

BY CARL SANDBURG

ABRAHAM LINCOLN THE PRAIRIE YEARS

ABRAHAM LINCOLN THE WAR YEARS

MARY LINCOLN WIFE AND WIDOW

STORM OVER THE LAND

LINCOLN COLLECTOR

THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

(with Frederick H Meserve)

THE AMERICAN SONGBAG

THE CHICAGO RACE RIOTS

STEICHEN THE PHOTOGRAPHER

POTATO FACE

HOME FRONT MEMO

Novel

REMEMBRANCE ROCK

Poems

SMOKE AND STEEL

SLABS OF THE SUNBURNT WEST

CHICAGO POEMS CORNHUSKERS

GOOD MORNING, AMERICA

SELECTED POEMS

(edited by Rebecca West)

THE PEOPLE, YES

COMPLETE POEMS

For Young Folks

ROOTABAGA STORIES ROOTABAGA PIGEONS

ABE LINCOLN GROWS UP

EARLY MOON

Complete Poems

Carl Sandburg

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY, NEW YORK

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Notes for a Preface

"FROM the age of six I had a mania for drawing the forms of things By the time I was fifty I had published an infinity of designs but all I have produced before the age of seventy is not worth taking into account. At seventy-three, I have learned a little about the real structure of nature, of animals, plants, trees, birds, fishes, and insects In consequence, when I am eighty, I shall have made still more progress, at ninety I shall penetrate the mystery of things, at a hundred I shall certainly have reached a marvellous stage, and when I am a hundred and ten, everything I do, be it but a dot or a line, will be alive I beg those who live as long as I to see if I do not keep my word Wntten at the age of seventy-five by me, once Hokusai, today Gwako Rojin, the old man mad about drawing"—From Preface to *The Hundred Views of Fuji*

1

The inexplicable is all around us So is the incomprehensible So is the unintelligible Interviewing Babe Ruth in 1928 for the *Chicago Daily News*, I put it to him, "People come and ask what's your system for hitting home runs—that so?" "Yes," said the Babe, "and all I can tell 'em is I pick a good one and sock it I get back to the dugout and they ask me what it was I hit and I tell 'em I don't know except it looked good"

Tyrus Raymond Cobb, who in twenty-four seasons played more games (3033), made more hits (4191), scored more runs (2244) and stole more bases (892) than any other player who ever wore spiked shoes—Ty Cobb at the end of one season got the question from sports writers, "We've watched you close this season and we find you've got eleven different ways of sliding to second At what point between first and second do you decide which of those eleven ways you'll use?" Ty flashed, "I never think about it—I just slide"

All around us the imponderable and the unfathomed—at these targets many a poet has shot his bullets of silver and scored a bull's-eye, or missed with dull pellets of paper.

Will Rogers, twirling his cowhand rope, insisted, "We are all ignorant but on different subjects" Picasso gives his slant as to his own ignorance related to that of others, "Why should I blame anybody else but myself if I cannot understand what I know nothing about?" And in Chicago we heard William Butler Yeats quote his father, "What can be explained is not poetry"

The Spanish poet Lorca saw one plain apple infinite as the sea "The life of an apple when it is a delicate flower to the moment when, golden russet, it drops from the tree into the grass is as mysterious and as great as the perpetual rhythm of the tides And a poet must know this" Lorca would instruct us "The magic virtue of a poem consists in being always daemon-ridden so that it baptizes with dark water those who look at it The daemon? Where is the daemon?"

I have known newspaper staffs where a saying ran, "The way to be a Star Reporter is to break all the rules" I heard Steinbeck say regarding *Of Mice and Men*, "I began with an equation and after that the story wrote itself" Paganini had a formula toil, solitude, prayer Steichen after World War I put in a year making a thousand photographs of a white cup and saucer, a quest in light and shadow Maugham crosses up Forster on how to write a novel and both heave Walter Scott into the ash can Shakespeare wrote a certain amount of trash—because his theater had to have a new play next Tuesday

2

Readers of poetry—and writers of it—can harken to Thomas Babington Macaulay in 1825, "Perhaps no person can be a poet, or can even enjoy poetry, without a certain unsoundness of mind" Does he say that if you are perfectly sane, a respectable citizen with a well-ordered mind, you shouldn't try writing poetry or reading it? And if you are a little "off the beam" mentally you will get along better in the poetry world? Some would decide it is well he used the word "perhaps," which leaves it open to debate along with the American proverb, "Every family tree has its nut"

Many a father has held the viewpoint of Lord Chesterfield writing his son, "I do not find that God has made you a poet and I am very glad that he has not" Sweeping ran the disgust of William Congreve in 1695, "Turn pimp, flatterer, quack, lawyer, parson, be chaplain to an atheist, anything but poet, for a poet is worse, more servile, timorous and fawning, than any I have named"

"Opinions—how they do love their opinions!" I heard the Colorado

poet Tom Ferril saying "They imagine their every little idle opinion is a big idea"

We can find subtlety or fun in the Chicago surgeon Jake Buchbinder saying to Fanny Butcher, "I enjoy phony jewels as well as the real thing—if they are good fakes I like make-believe pearls which are so real that they have to be taken to experts who can detect the true gleam I like to see women wearing pendants from their ears made from reclaimed pop bottles—when I can't tell the difference"

3

Artist, beggarman or thief may take recourse to ancient Anglo-Saxon law The accused in the dock hearing the question, "Are you guilty or not guilty?" had the privilege, if he so elected, to answer, "I stands mute"

Herein are somewhat more than 800 pieces written between the years 1910 and 1950 Seven books are now fastened and sealed into one book How the pieces came to be written would make a long chapter in autobiography or a fair-sized book in itself During the forty years of these writings came the First World War, the gay postwar prosperity years, the Great Depression, the Second World War, peace and the Cold War, global drama on a colossal scale

Chicago Poems, in 1916, came first Alice Corbin, an editor of the magazine *Poetry*, had urged the manuscript on Alfred Harcourt, then secretary of Henry Holt and Company, and his instigations brought the book into print *Cornhuskers* followed in 1918 The third book, *Smoke and Steel*, came in 1920 under imprint of the new publishing house of Harcourt, Brace and Company, followed by *Slabs of the Sunburnt West* in 1922 The fifth book came in 1928, its title piece *Good Morning, America* being the Phi Beta Kappa poem at Harvard that year The sixth came in 1936 titled *The People, Yes* and dedicated "to contributors dead and living" Affirmative of swarming and brawling Democracy, it attempts to give back to the people their own lingo

Most of the pieces in the seventh, *New Section*, have herein their first publication between book covers, some having seen print in magazines and newspapers This is true especially of those headed "War-Time," all but two of which appeared during the Second World War If some of the pieces in this section seem to be not for this hour, they can, as with others in the earlier books, be passed by as annals, chronicles or punctuation points of a vanished period Included in *New Section* are about forty pieces seeing print for the first time This applies to all under the heading "Present Hour" and about half under "Sky Talk" which ends the book.

4

There are poets of the cloister and the quiet corner, of green fields and the earth serene in its changes. There are poets of streets and struggles, of dust and combat, of violence wanton or justified, of plain folk living close to a hard earth as in the great though neglected poem *Piers Plowman*. There have been poets whose themes wove through both of the foregoing approaches. John M. Synge presented a viewpoint in this era ever worth care and thought. "When men lose their poetic feeling for ordinary life, and cannot write poetry of ordinary things, their exalted poetry is likely to lose its strength of exaltation, in the way men cease to build beautiful churches when they have lost happiness in building shops. Many of the older poets, such as Villon and Herrick and Burns, used the whole of their personal life as their material, and the verse written in this way was read by strong men, and thieves, and deacons, not by little cliques only."

✓Poetry and politics, the relation of the poets to society, to democracy, to monarchy, to dictatorships—we have here a theme whose classic is yet to be written. Some of its implications I tried for in my dedication of a book to the poet Stephen Vincent Benet.

"He knew the distinction between pure art and propaganda in the written or spoken word. He could sing to give men music, consolation, pleasure. He could intone chant or prayer pointing the need for men to act. He illustrated the code and creed of those writers who seek to widen the areas of freedom for all men, knowing that men of ideas vanish first when freedom vanishes. He saw that a writer's silence on living issues can in itself constitute a propaganda of conduct leading toward the deterioration or death of freedom. He wrote often hoping that men would act because of his words. He could have been Olympian, whimsical, seeking to be timeless amid bells of doom not to be put off."

5

There is a formal poetry perfect only in form, "all dressed up and nowhere to go." The number of syllables, the designated and required stresses of accent, the rhymes if wanted—they come off with the skill of a solved crossword puzzle. Yet its animation and connotation are less than that of "a dead mackerel in the moonshine," the latter even as an extinct form reporting that once it was a living fish aswim in bright waters.

✓A poet explains for us what for him is poetry by what he presents to us in his poems. A painter makes definitions of what for him is art by

the kind of paintings his brush puts on canvas. An actor defines dramatic art as best he can by the way he plays his parts. The playwright in his offering of dramatic action and lines tells us what he regards as theater art. And so on down the line. The novelist explains his theory of creative literature by the stories and people in his books. There is no escape. There stands the work of the man, the woman, who wrought it. We go to it, read it, look at it, perhaps go back to it many a time and it is for each of us what we make of it. The creator of it can say it means this or that—or it means for you whatever you take it to mean. He can say it happened, it came into being and it now exists apart from him and nothing can be done about it.

Compact and charged with a curious Hoosier finality is the definition from George Ade: "A classic is a book that people refuse to let die."

6

Oliver Wendell Holmes, skilled rhymester, told a young poet: "When you write in prose you say what you mean. When you write in verse you say what you must." Having said this to the young man, Holmes bethought himself and then wrote, "I was thinking more especially of rhymed verse. Rhythm alone is a tether, and not a very long one. But rhymes are iron fetters, it is dragging a chain and ball to march under their incumbrance, it is a clog-dance you are figuring in when you execute your metrical *pas seul*. You want to say something about the heavenly bodies, and you have a beautiful line ending with the word stars . . . You cannot make any use of cars, I will suppose, you have no occasion to talk about scars, 'the red planet Mars' has been used already, Dibdin has said enough about the gallant tars, what is there left for you but bars? So you give up your trains of thought, capitulate to necessity, and manage to lug in some kind of allusion, in place or out of place, which will allow you to make use of bars. Can there be imagined a more certain process for breaking up all continuity of thought, than this miserable subjugation of intellect to the clink of well or ill matched syllables?"

The fact is ironic. A proficient and sometimes exquisite performer in rhymed verse goes out of his way to register the point that the more rhyme there is in poetry the more danger of its tricking the writer into something other than the urge in the beginning.

7

A well-done world history of poetry would tell us of the beginnings and the continuing tradition of blank verse, rhymed verse, ballads, bal-

lades, sonnets, triolets, rondeaus, villanelles, the sestina, the pantoum, the hokku, also odes, elegiacs, idylls, lyrics, hymns, quatrains, couplets, ditties, limericks, and all the other forms These are fixed, frozen, immutable, in a Japanese hokku you are allowed exactly seventeen syllables and if you try to make it in sixteen or eighteen you're out of luck Such a history of poetry, however, might go a long way in research, chronicle, and discussion of a vital body of ancient and modern poems under the following (and more) heads

- 1 Chants
- 2 Psalms
- 3 Gnomics
- 4 Contemplations
- 5 Proverbs
- 6 Epitaphs
- 7 Litanies
- 8 Incidents of intensely concentrated action or utterance

Under each of the above heads could be gathered a multitude of instances There are "strict formalists in soup-and-fish" who would deny such instances being valid poetry They can be confronted with a superb and passionate verse from the mouth of Oliver Cromwell "My brethren, by the bowels of Christ I beseech you, bethink you that you may be mistaken" (Do we have here the cadenced utterance of passion?) Or we could cite the Union General in April of 1864, bemoaning blunders and corruption, "May God save my country—if there is a God—and if I have a country" Or a Michelangelo saying in 1509, "I have no friends of any kind and I do not want any," and forty years later writing, "I am always alone and I speak to no one"

We could add the Irish toast "May the road to hell grow green waiting for you" We could copy from Olive Schreiner's diary "I have such a longing for friendship, someone to talk to really I wonder if it is all a delusion Even any kind of love I want Death is so near and I have loved so little" We could offer an epitaph from the novel *Remembrance Rock*

*He was a practical man
who lived dreamless
Now he sleeps here
as he lived—dreamless*

Or we could draw from Justice Holmes "I have always sought to guide the future—but it is very lonely sometimes trying to play God"

8

No two persons register precisely the same to a work of art Mark Twain tells, as one version has it, of two men who for the first time laid eyes on the tumultuous and majestic Grand Canyon of Arizona One cried out, "I'll be God damned!" The other fell to his knees in prayer Mark contended their religious feelings were the same though the ritual was different

After the first performance of Strauss's *Salome* in Berlin, the *Tageblatt's* music critic raved against it Seeing Grieg in the lobby he asked the Norwegian composer, "What do you think of it?" The reply came cool as a cube of iced cucumber, "How can I tell you that? I have heard it only once"

Of Turner's painting, *The Slave Ship*, Ruskin wrote it was "perfect and immortal" The painter Inness declared, "It's claptrap" Thackeray was puzzled and neutral "I don't know whether it's sublime or ridiculous"

Lincoln rated the Declaration of Independence an "immortal emblem," though Rufus Choate earlier held it to be a string of "glittering generalities" Choate it was who listened to Italian grand opera, hearing the words but not knowing what they were saying, and asking his daughter, "Interpret for me the libretto lest I dilate with the wrong emotion"

What is instinct? What is thought? Where is the absolute line between these two? Nobody knows—as yet What is an Emotion as apart from an Idea? When are a Concept and a Feeling identical? Nobody knows—exactly—as yet What is an ideational state of mind as set off from a reverie? When do the foregoing seemingly contrasted urges of blood and brain move into a confluence with an end result of Creative Art? They're working on it If or when they filch this secret from the broad bosom of Mother Nature they will have solved the mystery of what for long has been termed Genius

What is this borderland of dream and logic, of fantasy and reason, where the roots and tentacles of mind and personality float and drift into the sudden shaping of a flash resulting in a scheme, a form, a design, an invention, a machine, an image, a song, a symphony, a drama, a poem? There are those who believe they know—and those who hope they may yet know

9

As years pass and experience writes new records in our mind life, we go back to some works of art we rejected in the early days and find values we missed. Work, love, laughter, pain, death, put impressions on us as time passes, and we brood over what has happened, praying it may be an "exalted brooding." Out of songs and scads and the mystery of personal development, we may get eyes that pick out intentions we had not seen before in people, in art, in books and poetry.

Naturally, too, the reverse happens. What we register to at one period of life, what we find gay and full of fine nourishment at one time, we may find later has lost interest for us. A few masterpieces last across the years. We usually discard some. A few masterpieces are enough. Why this is so we do not know. For each individual his new acquisitions and old discards are different.

Perhaps no wrong is done and no temple of human justice violated in pointing out that each authentic poet makes a style of his own. Sometimes this style is so clearly the poet's own that when he is imitated it is known who is imitated. Shakespeare, Villon, Li Po, Whitman—each sent forth his language and impress of thought and feeling from a different style of gargoyle spout. In the spacious highways of books major or minor, each poet is allowed the stride that will get him where he wants to go if, God help him, he can hit that stride and keep it.

10

At the age of six, as my fingers first found how to shape the alphabet, I decided to become a person of letters. At the age of ten I had scrawled letters on slates, on paper, on boxes and walls and I formed an ambition to become a sign-painter. At twenty I was an American soldier in Puerto Rico writing letters printed in the home town paper. At twenty-one I went to West Point, being a classmate of Douglas MacArthur and Ulysses S. Grant III—for two weeks—returning home after passing in spelling, geography, history, failing in arithmetic and grammar. At twenty-three I edited a college paper and wrote many a paragraph that after a lapse of fifty years still seems funny, the same applying to the college yearbook I edited the following year. Across several years I wrote many odd pieces—two slim books—not worth later reprint. In a six-year period came four books of poetry having a variety of faults, no other person more keenly aware of their accomplishments and shortcomings than myself. In the two books for children, in this period, are a few cornland tales that go

on traveling, one about "The Two Skyscrapers Who Decided to Have a Child" At fifty I had published a two-volume biography and *The American Songbag*, and there was puzzlement as to whether I was a poet, a biographer, a wandering troubadour with a guitar, a midwest Hans Christian Andersen, or a historian of current events whose newspaper reporting was gathered into a book *The Chicago Race Riots*. At fifty-one I wrote America's first biography of a photographer At sixty-one came a four-volume biography, bringing doctoral degrees at Harvard, Yale, New York University, Wesleyan, Lafayette, Lincoln Memorial, Syracuse, Rollins, Dartmouth—Augustana and Uppsala at Stockholm I am still studying verbs and the mystery of how they connect nouns I am more suspicious of adjectives than at any other time in all my born days I have forgotten the meaning of twenty or thirty of my poems written thirty or forty years ago I still favor several simple poems published long ago which continue to have an appeal for simple people I have written by different methods and in a wide miscellany of moods and have seldom been afraid to travel in lands and seas where I met fresh scenes and new songs All my life I have been trying to learn to read, to see and hear, and to write At sixty-five I began my first novel, and the five years lacking a month I took to finish it, I was still traveling, still a seeker I should like to think that as I go on writing there will be sentences truly alive, with verbs quivering, with nouns giving color and echoes It could be, in the grace of God, I shall live to be eighty-nine, as did Hokusai, and speaking my farewell to earthly scenes, I might paraphrase "If God had let me live five years longer I should have been a writer"

CHICAGO POEMS

TO

My Wife and Pal

LILLIAN STEICHEN SANDBURG

Chicago Poems

CHICAGO

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler,
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen your
painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys
And they tell me you are crooked and I answer Yes, it is true I have seen
the gunman kill and go free to kill again
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is On the faces of women
and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.
And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this my
city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them
Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be
alive and coarse and strong and cunning.
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a tall
bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities,
Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage pitted
against the wilderness,
Bareheaded,
Shoveling,
Wrecking,
Planning,
Building, breaking, rebuilding,
Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle,

Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his ribs
the heart of the people,

Laughing!

Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-naked,
sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation

SKETCH

THE shadows of the ships
Rock on the crest
In the low blue lustre
Of the tardy and the soft inrolling tide

A long brown bar at the dip of the sky
Puts an arm of sand in the span of salt

The lucid and endless wrinkles
Draw in, lapse and withdraw
Wavelets crumble and white spent bubbles
Wash on the floor of the beach

Rocking on the crest
In the low blue lustre
Are the shadows of the ships

MASSES

AMONG the mountains I wandered and saw blue haze and red crag and
was amazed,
On the beach where the long push under the endless tide maneuvers, I
stood silent,
Under the stars on the prairie watching the Dipper slant over the horizon's
grass, I was full of thoughts
Great men, pageants of war and labor, soldiers and workers, mothers lifting
their children—these all I touched, and felt the solemn thrill of them
And then one day I got a true look at the Poor, millions of the Poor,

patient and toiling, more patient than crags, tides, and stars, innumerable, patient as the darkness of night—and all broken, humble ruins of nations

LOST

DESOLATE and lone
All night long on the lake
Where fog trails and mist creeps,
The whistle of a boat
Calls and cries unendingly,
Like some lost child
In tears and trouble
Hunting the harbor's breast
And the harbor's eyes

THE HARBOR

PASSING through huddled and ugly walls
By doorways where women
Looked from their hunger-deep eyes,
Haunted with shadows of hunger-hands,
Out from the huddled and ugly walls,
I came sudden, at the city's edge,
On a blue burst of lake,
Long lake waves breaking under the sun
On a spray-flung curve of shore,
And a fluttering storm of gulls,
Masses of great gray wings
And flying white bellies
Veering and wheeling free in the open.

THEY WILL SAY

OF my city the worst that men will ever say is this
You took little children away from the sun and the dew,
And the glimmers that played in the grass under the great sky,
And the reckless rain, you put them between walls

To work, broken and smothered, for bread and wages,
To eat dust in their throats and die empty-hearted
For a little handful of pay on a few Saturday nights

MILL-DOORS

You never come back
I say good-by when I see you going in the doors,
The hopeless open doors that call and wait
And take you then for—how many cents a day?
How many cents for the sleepy eyes and fingers?

I say good-by because I know they tap your wrists,
In the dark, in the silence, day by day,
And all the blood of you drop by drop,
And you are old before you are young
You never come back

HALSTED STREET CAR

Come you, cartoonists,
Hang on a strap with me here
At seven o'clock in the morning
On a Halsted street car

Take your pencils
And draw these faces

Try with your pencils for these crooked faces,
That pig-sticker in one corner—his mouth—
That overall factory girl—her loose cheeks

Find for your pencils
A way to mark your memory
Of tired empty faces

After their night's sleep,
In the moist dawn

And cool daybreak,
Faces
Tired of wishes,
Empty of dreams

CLARK STREET BRIDGE

Dust of the feet
And dust of the wheels,
Wagons and people going,
All day feet and wheels.

Now . .
Only stars and mist
A lonely policeman,
Two cabaret dancers,
Stars and mist again,
No more feet or wheels,
No more dust and wagons.

Voices of dollars
And drops of blood
. .
Voices of broken hearts,
. . . Voices singing, singing,
. . Silver voices, singing,
Softer than the stars,
Softer than the mist

PASSERS-BY

PASSERS-BY,
Out of your many faces
Flash memories to me
Now at the day end
Away from the sidewalks
Where your shoe soles traveled
And your voices rose and blent

To form the city's afternoon roar
Hindering an old silence

Passers-by,
I remember lean ones among you,
Throats in the clutch of a hope,
Lips written over with strivings,
Mouths that kiss only for love,
Records of great wishes slept with,
 Held long
And prayed and toiled for

Yes,
Written on
Your mouths
And your throats
I read them
When you passed by

THE WALKING MAN OF RODIN

LEGS hold a torso away from the earth
And a regular high poem of legs is here
Powers of bone and cord raise a belly and lungs
Out of ooze and over the loam where eyes look and ears hear
And arms have a chance to hammer and shoot and run motors
 You make us
 Proud of our legs, old man

And you left off the head here,
The skull found always crumbling neighbor of the ankles

SUBWAY

Down between the walls of shadow
Where the iron laws insist,
 The hunger voices mock

The worn wayfaring men
With the hunched and humble shoulders,
Throw their laughter into toil

THE SHOVEL MAN

ON the street
Slung on his shoulder is a handle half way across,
Tied in a big knot on the scoop of cast iron
Are the overalls faded from sun and rain in the ditches;
Spatter of dry clay sticking yellow on his left sleeve
And a flimsy shirt open at the throat,
I know him for a shovel man,
A dago working for a dollar six bits a day
And a dark-eyed woman in the old country dreams of him for one of the
world's ready men with a pair of fresh lips and a kiss better than
all the wild grapes that ever grew in Tuscany

A TEAMSTER'S FAREWELL *Sobs En Route to a Penitentiary*

GOOD-BY now to the streets and the clash of wheels and locking hubs,
The sun coming on the brass buckles and harness knobs,
The muscles of the horses sliding under their heavy haunches,
Good-by now to the traffic policeman and his whistle,
The smash of the iron hoof on the stones,
All the crazy wonderful slamming roar of the street—
O God, there's noises I'm going to be hungry for.

FISH CRIER

I KNOW a Jew fish crier down on Maxwell Street with a voice like a north
wind blowing over corn stubble in January
He dangles herring before prospective customers evincing a joy identical
with that of Pavlowa dancing

His face is that of a man terribly glad to be selling fish, terribly glad that
God made fish, and customers to whom he may call his wares from
a pushcart

PICNIC BOAT

SUNDAY night and the park policemen tell each other it is dark as a
stack of black cats on Lake Michigan
A big picnic boat comes home to Chicago from the peach farms of
Saugatuck
Hundreds of electric bulbs break the night's darkness, a flock of red and
yellow birds with wings at a standstill.
Running along the deck-railings are festoons and leaping in curves are
loops of light from prow and stern to the tall smokestacks
Over the hoarse crunch of waves at my pier comes a hoarse answer in
the rhythmic oompa of the brasses playing a Polish folk-song for the
home-comers

HAPPINESS

I ASKED professors who teach the meaning of life to tell me what is hap-
piness
And I went to famous executives who boss the work of thousands of men
They all shook their heads and gave me a smile as though I was trying
to fool with them
And then one Sunday afternoon I wandered out along the Desplaines
river
And I saw a crowd of Hungarians under the trees with their women and
children and a keg of beer and an accordion

MUCKERS

TWENTY men stand watching the muckers
Stabbing the sides of the ditch
Where clay gleams yellow,
Driving the blades of their shovels
Deeper and deeper for the new gas mains,
Wiping sweat off their faces
With red bandanas.

The muckers work on pausing to pull
Their boots out of suckholes where they slosh

Of the twenty looking on
Ten murmur, "O, it's a hell of a job,"
Ten others, "Jesus, I wish I had the job "

BLACKLISTED

Why shall I keep the old name?
What is a name anywhere anyway?
A name is a cheap thing all fathers and mothers leave each child
A job is a job and I want to live, so
Why does God Almighty or anybody else care whether I take a new
name to go by?

GRACELAND

TOMB of a millionaire,
A multi-millionaire, ladies and gentlemen,
Place of the dead where they spend every year
The usury of twenty-five thousand dollars
For upkeep and flowers
To keep fresh the memory of the dead
The merchant prince gone to dust
Commanded in his written will
Over the signed name of his last testament
Twenty-five thousand dollars be set aside
For roses, lilacs, hydrangeas, tulips,
For perfume and color, sweetness of remembrance
Around his last long home.

(A hundred cash girls want nickels to go to the movies tonight
In the back stalls of a hundred saloons, women are at tables
Drinking with men or waiting for men jingling loose silver dollars in
their pockets
In a hundred furnished rooms is a girl who sells silk or dress goods or
leather stuff for six dollars a week wages

And when she pulls on her stockings in the morning she is reckless
about God and the newspapers and the police, the talk of her home
town or the name people call her)

CHILD OF THE ROMANS

THE dago shovelman sits by the railroad track
Eating a noon meal of bread and bologna
A train whirls by, and men and women at tables
Alive with red roses and yellow jonquils,
Eat steaks running with brown gravy,
Strawberries and cream, eclairs and coffee
The dago shovelman finishes the dry bread and bologna,
Washes it down with a dipper from the water-box,
And goes back to the second half of a ten-hour day's work
Keeping the road-bed so the roses and jonquils
Shake hardly at all in the cut glass vases
Standing slender on the tables in the dining cars

THE RIGHT TO GRIEF *To Certain Poets About to Die*

TAKE your fill of intimate remorse, perfumed sorrow,
Over the dead child of a millionaire,
And the pity of Death refusing any check on the bank
Which the millionaire might order his secretary to scratch off
And get cashed

Very well,
You for your grief and I for mine
Let me have a sorrow my own if I want to

I shall cry over the dead child of a stockyards hunky
His job is sweeping blood off the floor
He gets a dollar seventy cents a day when he works
And it's many tubs of blood he shoves out with a broom day by day.

Now his three year old daughter
Is in a white coffin that cost him a week's wages.

Every Saturday night he will pay the undertaker fifty cents till the debt
is wiped out

The hunky and his wife and the kids
Cry over the pinched face almost at peace in the white box
They remember it was scrawny and ran up high doctor bills
They are glad it is gone for the rest of the family now will have more
to eat and wear

Yet before the majesty of Death they cry around the coffin
And wipe their eyes with red bandanas and sob when the priest says,
"God have mercy on us all"

I have a right to feel my throat choke about this
You take your grief and I mine—see?
Tomorrow there is no funeral and the hunky goes back to his job sweep-
ing blood off the floor at a dollar seventy cents a day
All he does all day long is keep on shoving hog blood ahead of him with
a broom

MAG

I wish to God I never saw you, Mag
I wish you never quit your job and came along with me
I wish we never bought a license and a white dress
For you to get married in the day we ran off to a minister
And told him we would love each other and take care of each other
Always and always long as the sun and the rain lasts anywhere
Yes, I'm wishing now you lived somewhere away from here
And I was a bum on the bumpers a thousand miles away dead broke
I wish the kids had never come
And rent and coal and clothes to pay for
And a grocery man calling for cash,
Every day cash for beans and prunes
I wish to God I never saw you, Mag
I wish to God the kids had never come

ONION DAYS

MRS GABRIELLE GIOVANNETTI comes along Peoria Street every morning
at nine o'clock

With kindling wood piled on top of her head, her eyes looking straight
ahead to find the way for her old feet

Her daughter-in-law, Mrs Pietro Giovannetti, whose husband was killed
in a tunnel explosion through the negligence of a fellow-servant,

Works ten hours a day, sometimes twelve, picking onions for Jasper on
the Bowmanville road

She takes a street car at half-past five in the morning, Mrs Pietro Gio-
vannetti does,

And gets back from Jasper's with cash for her day's work, between nine
and ten o'clock at night

Last week she got eight cents a box, Mrs Pietro Giovannetti, picking
onions for Jasper,

But this week Jasper dropped the pay to six cents a box because so many
women and girls were answering the ads in the *Daily News*

Jasper belongs to an Episcopal church in Ravenswood and on certain
Sundays

He enjoys chanting the Nicene creed with his daughters on each side of
him joining their voices with his

If the preacher repeats old sermons of a Sunday, Jasper's mind wanders to
his 700-acre farm and how he can make it produce more efficiently

And sometimes he speculates on whether he could word an ad in the
Daily News so it would bring more women and girls out to his farm
and reduce operating costs

Mrs Pietro Giovannetti is far from desperate about life, her joy is in a
child she knows will arrive to her in three months

And now while these are the pictures for today there are other pictures of
the Giovannetti people I could give you for tomorrow,

And how some of them go to the county agent on winter mornings with
their baskets for beans and cornmeal and molasses.

I listen to fellows saying here's good stuff for a novel or it might be
worked up into a good play

I say there's no dramatist living can put old Mrs Gabrielle Giovannetti
into a play with that kindling wood piled on top of her head coming
along Peoria Street nine o'clock in the morning.

POPULATION DRIFTS

NEW-MOWN hay smell and wind of the plain made her a woman whose
 ribs had the power of the hills in them and her hands were tough
 for work and there was passion for life in her womb
She and her man crossed the ocean and the years that marked their faces
 saw them haggling with landlords and grocers while six children
 played on the stones and prowled in the garbage cans
One child coughed its lungs away, two more have adenoids and can
 neither talk nor run like their mother, one is in jail, two have jobs
 in a box factory
And as they fold the pasteboard, they wonder what the wishing is and
 the wistful glory in them that flutters faintly when the glimmer of
 spring comes on the air or the green of summer turns brown
They do not know it is the new-mown hay smell calling and the wind
 of the plain praying for them to come back and take hold of life
 again with tough hands and with passion

CRIPPLE

ONCE when I saw a cripple
 Gasping slowly his last days with the white plague,
 Looking from hollow eyes, calling for air,
 Desperately gesturing with wasted hands
 In the dark and dust of a house down in a slum,
 I said to myself
 I would rather have been a tall sunflower
 Living in a country garden
 Lifting a golden-brown face to the summer,
 Rain-washed and dew-misted,
 Mixed with the poppies and ranking hollyhocks,
 And wonderingly watching night after night
 The clear silent processions of stars

A FENCE

Now the stone house on the lake front is finished and the workmen are
beginning the fence
The palings are made of iron bars with steel points that can stab the life
out of any man who falls on them
As a fence, it is a masterpiece, and will shut off the rabble and all vaga-
bonds and hungry men and all wandering children looking for a
place to play
Passing through the bars and over the steel points will go nothing except
Death and the Rain and Tomorrow

ANNA IMROTH

Cross the hands over the breast here—so
Straighten the legs a little more—so
And call for the wagon to come and take her home
Her mother will cry some and so will her sisters and brothers
But all of the others got down and they are safe and this is the only one
of the factory girls who wasn't lucky in making the jump when the
fire broke
It is the hand of God and the lack of fire escapes.

WORKING GIRLS

THE working girls in the morning are going to work—long lines of them
afoot amid the downtown stores and factories, thousands with little
brick-shaped lunches wrapped in newspapers under their arms
Each morning as I move through this river of young-woman life I feel a
wonder about where it is all going, so many with a peach bloom of
young years on them and laughter of red lips and memories in their
eyes of dances the night before and plays and walks.
Green and gray streams run side by side in a river and so here are always
the others, those who have been over the way, the women who know
each one the end of life's gamble for her, the meaning and the clue,
the how and the why of the dances and the arms that passed around
their waists and the fingers that played in their hair.

Faces go by wrtten over "I know it all, I know where the bloom and
the laughter go and I have memories," and the feet of these move
slower and they have wisdom where the others have beauty
So the green and the gray move in the early morning on the downtown
streets

MAMIE

MAMIE beat her head against the bars of a little Indiana town and
dreamed of romance and big things off somewhere the way the rail-
road trains all ran
She could see the smoke of the engines get lost down where the streaks
of steel flashed in the sun and when the newspapers came in on the
morning mail she knew there was a big Chicago far off, where all
the trains ran
She got tired of the barber shop boys and the post office chatter and the
church gossip and the old pieces the band played on the Fourth of
July and Decoration Day
And sobbed at her fate and beat her head against the bars and was going
to kill herself
When the thought came to her that if she was going to die she might as
well die struggling for a clutch of romance among the streets of
Chicago
She has a job now at six dollars a week in the basement of the Boston
Store
And even now she beats her head against the bars in the same old way
and wonders if there is a bigger place the railroads run to from Chi-
cago where maybe there is
romance
and big things
and real dreams
that never go smash

PERSONALITY

Musings of a Police Reporter in the Identification Bureau

You have loved forty women, but you have only one thumb
You have led a hundred secret lives, but you mark only one thumb
You go round the world and fight in a thousand wars and win all the
world's honors, but when you come back home the print of the one
thumb your mother gave you is the same print of thumb you had
in the old home when your mother kissed you and said good-by
Out of the whirling womb of time come millions of men and their feet
crowd the earth and they cut one another's throats for room to stand
and among them all are not two thumbs alike
Somewhere is a Great God of Thumbs who can tell the inside story of this

CUMULATIVES

STORMS have beaten on this point of land
And ships gone to wreck here
 and the passers-by remember it
 with talk on the deck at night
 as they near it

Fists have beaten on the face of this old prize-fighter
And his battles have held the sporting pages
 and on the street they indicate him with their
 right forefinger as one who once wore
 a championship belt

A hundred stories have been published and a thousand rumored
About why this tall dark man has divorced two beautiful young women
And married a third who resembles the first two
 and they shake their heads and say, "There he goes,"
 when he passes by in sunny weather or in rain
 along the city streets

TO CERTAIN JOURNEYMEN

UNDERTAKERS, hearse drivers, grave diggers,
I speak to you as one not afraid of your business

You handle dust going to a long country,
You know the secret behind your job is the same whether you lower the
coffin with modern, automatic machinery, well-oiled and noiseless,
or whether the body is laid in by naked hands and then covered by
the shovels

Your day's work is done with laughter many days of the year,
And you earn a living by those who say good-by today in thin whispers

CHAMFORT

THERE'S Chamfort He's a sample
Locked himself in his library with a gun,
Shot off his nose and shot out his right eye
And this Chamfort knew how to write
And thousands read his books on how to live,
But he himself didn't know
How to die by force of his own hand—see?
They found him a red pool on the carpet
Cool as an April forenoon,
Talking and talking gay maxims and grim epigrams
Well, he wore bandages over his nose and right eye,
Drank coffee and chatted many years
With men and women who loved him
Because he laughed and daily dared Death
"Come and take me."

LIMITED

I AM riding on a limited express, one of the crack trains of the nation
Hurling across the prairie into blue haze and dark an' go fifteen all-steel
coaches holding a thousand people
(All the coaches shall be scrap and rust and all the men and women
laughing in the diners and sleepers shall pass to ashes)
I ask a man in the smoker where he is going and he answers "Omaha"

THE HAS-BEEN

A STONE face higher than six horses stood five thousand years gazing at
the world seeming to clutch a secret
A boy passes and throws a niggerhead that chips off the end of the nose
from the stone face, he lets fly a mud ball that spatters the right eye
and cheek of the old looker-on
The boy laughs and goes whistling "cc-cc-cc cc-cc-cc." The stone face
stands silent, seeming to clutch a secret

IN A BACK ALLEY

REMEMBRANCE for a great man is this.
The newsies are pitching pennies
And on the copper disk is the man's face
Dead lover of boys, what do you ask for now?

A COIN

YOUR western heads here cast on money,
You are the two that fade away together,
Partners in the mist

Lunging buffalo shoulder,
Lean Indian face,
We who come after where you are gone
Salute your forms on the new nickel.

You are
To us
The past

Runners
On the prairie
Good-by

DYNAMITER

I SAT with a dynamiter at supper in a German saloon eating steak and onions
And he laughed and told stories of his wife and children and the cause of labor and the working class
It was laughter of an unshakable man knowing life to be a rich and red-blooded thing
Yes, his laugh rang like the call of gray birds filled with a glory of joy ramming their winged flight through a rain storm
His name was in many newspapers as an enemy of the nation and few keepers of churches or schools would open their doors to him
Over the steak and onions not a word was said of his deep days and nights as a dynamiter
Only I always remember him as a lover of life, a lover of children, a lover of all free, reckless laughter everywhere—lover of red hearts and red blood the world over

ICE HANDLER

I KNOW an ice handler who wears a flannel shirt with pearl buttons the size of a dollar,
And he lugs a hundred-pound hunk into a saloon icebox, helps himself to cold ham and rye bread,
Tells the bartender it's hotter than yesterday and will be hotter yet tomorrow, by Jesus,
And is on his way with his head in the air and a hard pair of fists
He spends a dollar or so every Saturday night on a two hundred pound woman who washes dishes in the Hotel Morrison
He remembers when the union was organized he broke the noses of two

scabs and loosened the nuts so the wheels came off six different wagons one morning, and he came around and watched the ice melt in the street

All he was sorry for was one of the scabs bit him on the knuckles of the right hand so they bled when he came around to the saloon to tell the boys about it

JACK

JACK was a swarthy, swaggering son-of-a-gun

He worked thirty years on the railroad, ten hours a day, and his hands were tougher than sole leather

He married a tough woman and they had eight children and the woman died and the children grew up and went away and wrote the old man every two years

He died in the poorhouse sitting on a bench in the sun telling reminiscences to other old men whose women were dead and children scattered

There was joy on his face when he died as there was joy on his face when he lived—he was a swarthy, swaggering son-of-a-gun

FELLOW CITIZENS

I DRANK musty ale at the Illinois Athletic Club with the millionaire manufacturer of Green River butter one night

And his face had the shining light of an old-time Quaker, he spoke of a beautiful daughter, and I knew he had a peace and a happiness up his sleeve somewhere

Then I heard Jim Kirch make a speech to the Advertising Association on the trade resources of South America

And the way he lighted a three-for-a-nickel stogie and cocked it at an angle regardless of the manners of our best people,

I knew he had a clutch on a real happiness even though some of the reporters on his newspaper say he is the living double of Jack London's Sea Wolf.

In the mayor's office the mayor himself told me he was happy though it is a hard job to satisfy all the office-seekers and eat all the dinners he is asked to eat.

Down in Gilpin Place, near Hull House, was a man with his jaw wrapped
for a bad toothache,
And he had it all over the butter millionaire, Jim Kirch and the mayor
when it came to happiness
He is a maker of accordions and guitars and not only makes them from
start to finish, but plays them after he makes them
And he had a guitar of mahogany with a walnut bottom he offered for
seven dollars and a half if I wanted it,
And another just like it, only smaller, for six dollars, though he never
mentioned the price till I asked him,
And he stated the price in a sorry way, as though the music and the
make of an instrument count for a million times more than the
price in money
I thought he had a real soul and knew a lot about God
There was light in his eyes of one who has conquered sorrow in so far as
sorrow is conquerable or worth conquering
Anyway he is the only Chicago citizen I was jealous of that day
He played a dance they play in some parts of Italy when the harvest of
grapes is over and the wine presses are ready for work.

NIGGER

I AM the nigger
Singer of songs,
Dancer
Softer than fluff of cotton . . .
Harder than dark earth
Roads beaten in the sun
By the bare feet of slaves . .
Foam of teeth breaking crash of laughter .
Red love of the blood of woman,
White love of the tumbling pickaninnies
Lazy love of the banjo thrum .
Sweated and driven for the harvest-wage,
Loud laughter with hands like hams,
Fists toughened on the handles,
Smiling the slumber dreams of old jungles,
Crazy as the sun and dew and dripping, heaving life of the jungle,

Brooding and muttering with memories of shackles
 I am the nigger
 Look at me
 I am the nigger

TWO NEIGHBORS

FACES of two eternities keep looking at me
One is Omar Khayam and the red stuff
 wherein men forget yesterday and tomorrow
 and remember only the voices and songs,
 the stories, newspapers and fights of today
One is Louis Cornaro and a slim trick
 of slow, short meals across slow, short years,
 letting Death open the door only in slow, short inches
I have a neighbor who swears by Omar
I have a neighbor who swears by Cornaro.

Both are happy

Faces of two eternities keep looking at me

Let them look

STYLE

STYLE—go ahead talking about style
You can tell where a man gets his style just
 as you can tell where Pavlowa got her legs
 or Ty Cobb his batting eye.

Go on talking
Only don't take my style away
 It's my face
 Maybe no good
 but anyway, my face
I talk with it, I sing with it, I see, taste and feel with it, I know why I
 want to keep it.

Kill my style
 and you break Pavlowa's legs,
 and you blind Ty Cobb's batting eye

TO BEACHEY, 1912

Riding against the east,
A veering, steady shadow
Purrs the motor-call
Of the man-bird
Ready with the death-laughter
In his throat
And in his heart always
The love of the big blue beyond

Only a man,
A far fleck of shadow on the east
Sitting at ease
With his hands on a wheel
And around him the large gray wings
Hold him, great soft wings,
Keep and deal kindly, O wings,
With the cool, calm shadow at the wheel

UNDER A HAT RIM

While the hum and the hurry
Of passing footfalls
Beat in my ear like the restless surf
Of a wind-blown sea,
A soul came to me
Out of the look on a face

Eyes like a lake
Where a storm-wind roams
Caught me from under
The rim of a hat
I thought of a midsea wreck
and bruised fingers clinging
to a broken state-room door

IN A BREATH
To the Williamson Brothers

HIGH noon White sun flashes on the Michigan Avenue asphalt Drum
of hoofs and whirr of motors Women trapesing along in flimsy
clothes catching play of sun-fire to their skin and eyes

Inside the playhouse are movies from under the sea From the heat of
pavements and the dust of sidewalks, passers-by go in a breath to be
witnesses of large cool sponges, large cool fishes, large cool valleys
and ridges of coral spread silent in the soak of the ocean floor thou
sands of years

A naked swimmer dives A knife in his right hand shoots a streak at the
throat of a shark The tail of the shark lashes One swing would kill
the swimmer . Soon the knife goes into the soft underneck of
the veering fish . . Its mouthful of teeth, each tooth a dagger
itself, set row on row, glistens when the shuddering, yawning cadaver
is hauled up by the brothers of the swimmer

Outside in the street is the murmur and singing of life in the sun—
horses, motors, women trapesing along in flimsy clothes, play of sun-
fire in their blood

BATH

A MAN saw the whole world as a grinning skull and cross-bones The
rose flesh of life shriveled from all faces Nothing counts Everything is a
fake Dust to dust and ashes to ashes and then an old darkness and a
useless silence So he saw it all Then he went to a Mischa Elman concert
Two hours waves of sound beat on his eardrums Music washed
something or other inside him Music broke down and rebuilt something
or other in his head and heart He joined in five encores for the young
Russian Jew with the fiddle When he got outside his heels hit the side-
walk a new way. He was the same man in the same world as before Only
there was a singing fire and a clumb of roses everlastingly over the world
he looked on.

BRONZES

I

THE bronze General Grant riding a bronze horse in Lincoln Park
Shrivels in the sun by day when the motor cars whirr by in long processions going somewhere to keep appointments for dinner and matineés and buying and selling
Though in the dusk and nightfall when high waves are piling
On the slabs of the promenade along the lake shore near by
I have seen the general dare the combers come closer
And make to ride his bronze horse out into the hoofs and guns of the storm

II

I cross Lincoln Park on a winter night when the snow is falling
Lincoln in bronze stands among the white lines of snow, his bronze forehead meeting soft echoes of the newsies crying forty thousand men are dead along the Yser, his bronze ears listening to the mumbled roar of the city at his bronze feet
A lithe Indian on a bronze pony, Shakespeare seated with long legs in bronze, Garibaldi in a bronze cape, they hold places in the cold, lonely snow tonight on their pedestals and so they will hold them past midnight and into the dawn

DUNES

WHAT do we see here in the sand dunes of the white moon alone with our thoughts, Bill,
Alone with our dreams, Bill, soft as the women tying scarves around their heads dancing,
Alone with a picture and a picture coming one after the other of all the dead,
The dead more than all these grains of sand one by one piled here in the moon,
Piled against the sky-line taking shapes like the hand of the wind wanted,
What do we see here, Bill, outside of what the wise men beat their heads on,
Outside of what the poets cry for and the soldiers drive on headlong and leave their skulls in the sun for—what, Bill?

ON THE WAY

LITTLE one, you have been buzzing in the books,
Flittering in the newspapers and drinking beer with lawyers
And amid the educated men of the clubs you have been getting an earful
 of speech from trained tongues
Take an earful from me once, go with me on a hike
Along sand stretches on the great inland sea here
And while the eastern breeze blows on us and the restless surge
Of the lake waves on the breakwater breaks with an ever fresh monotone,
Let us ask ourselves What is truth? what do you or I know?
How much do the wisest of the world's men know about where the
 massed human procession is going?

You have heard the mob laughed at?
I ask you Is not the mob rough as the mountains are rough?
And all things human rise from the mob and relapse and rise again as
 rain to the sea?

READY TO KILL

TEN minutes now I have been looking at this
I have gone by here before and wondered about it
This is a bronze memorial of a famous general
Riding horseback with a flag and a sword and a revolver on him
I want to smash the whole thing into a pile of junk to be hauled away to
 the scrap yard
I put it straight to you,
After the farmer, the miner, the shop man, the factory hand, the fireman
 and the teamster,
Have all been remembered with bronze memorials,
Shaping them on the job of getting all of us
Something to eat and something to wear,
When they stack a few silhouettes
 Against the sky
 Here in the park,

And show the real huskies that are doing the work of the world, and
feeding people instead of butchering them,
Then maybe I will stand here
And look easy at this general of the army holding a flag in the air,
And riding like hell on horseback
Ready to kill anybody that gets in his way,
Ready to run the red blood and slush the bowels of men all over the
sweet new grass of the prairie

TO A CONTEMPORARY BUNKSHOOTER

You come along tearing your shirt yelling about Jesus
Where do you get that stuff?
What do you know about Jesus?
Jesus had a way of talking soft and outside of a few bankers and higher-
ups among the con men of Jerusalem everybody liked to have this
Jesus around because he never made any fake passes and everything
he said went and he helped the sick and gave the people hope

You come along squirting words at us, shaking your fist and calling us
all dam fools so fierce the froth slobbers over your lips always
blabbing we're all going to hell straight off and you know all
about it

I've read Jesus' words I know what he said You don't throw any scare
into me I've got your number I know how much you know about
Jesus
He never came near clean people or dirty people but they felt clearer
because he came along It was your crowd of bankers and business
men and lawyers hired the slugers and murderers who put Jesus out
of the running

I say the same bunch backing you nailed the nails into the hands of this
Jesus of Nazareth He had lined up against him the same crooks and
strong-arm men now lined up with you paying your way

This Jesus was good to look at, smelled good, listened good He threw
out something fresh and beautiful from the skin of his body and the
touch of his hands wherever he passed along

You slimy bunkshooter, you put a smut on every human blossom in reach
of your rotten breath belching about hell-fire and hiccapping about
this Man who lived a clean life in Galilee

When are you going to quit making the carpenters build emergency
hospitals for women and girls driven crazy with wrecked nerves from
your gibberish about Jesus—I put it to you again Where do you get
that stuff, what do you know about Jesus?

Go ahead and bust all the chairs you want to Smash a whole wagon
load of furniture at every performance Turn sixty somersaults and
stand on your nutty head. If it wasn't for the way you scare the
women and kids I'd feel sorry for you and pass the hat

I like to watch a good four-flusher work, but not when he starts people
puking and calling for the doctors

I like a man that's got nerve and can pull off a great original performance,
but you—you're only a bug-house peddler of second-hand gospel—
you're only shoving out a phoney imitation of the goods this Jesus
wanted free as air and sunlight

You tell people living in shanties Jesus is going to fix it up all right with
them by giving them mansions in the skies after they're dead and the
worms have eaten 'em

You tell \$6 a week department store girls all they need is Jesus, you take
a steel trust wop, dead without having lived, gray and shrunken at
forty years of age, and you tell him to look at Jesus on the cross and
he'll be all right

You tell poor people they don't need any more money on payday and
even if it's fierce to be out of a job, Jesus'll fix that up all right, all
right—all they gotta do is take Jesus the way you say.

I'm telling you Jesus wouldn't stand for the stuff you're handing out. Jesus
played it different The bankers and lawyers of Jerusalem got their
sluggers and murderers to go after Jesus just because Jesus wouldn't
play their game He didn't sit in with the big thieves.

I don't want a lot of gab from a bunkshooter in my religion

I won't take my religion from any man who never works except with his
mouth and never chenshes any memory except the face of the
woman on the American silver dollar.

I ask you to come through and show me where you're pouring out the
blood of your life
I've been to this suburb of Jerusalem they call Golgotha, where they
nailed Him, and I know if the story is straight it was real blood ran
from His hands and the nail-holes, and it was real blood spurted in
red drops where the spear of the Roman soldier rammed in between
the ribs of this Jesus of Nazareth

SKYSCRAPER

By day the skyscraper looms in the smoke and sun and has a soul
Prairie and valley, streets of the city, pour people into it and they mingle
among its twenty floors and are poured out again back to the streets,
prairies and valleys

It is the men and women, boys and girls so poured in and out all day
that give the building a soul of dreams and thoughts and memories
(Dumped in the sea or fixed in a desert, who would care for the building
or speak its name or ask a policeman the way to it?)

Elevators slide on their cables and tubes catch letters and parcels and iron
pipes carry gas and water in and sewage out
Wires climb with secrets, carry light and carry words, and tell terrors and
profits and loves—curses of men grappling plans of business and
questions of women in plots of love

Hour by hour the caissons reach down to the rock of the earth and hold
the building to a turning planet
Hour by hour the girders play as ribs and reach out and hold together the
stone walls and floors
Hour by hour the hand of the mason and the stuff of the mortar clinch
the pieces and parts to the shape an architect voted
Hour by hour the sun and the rain, the air and the rust, and the press of
time running into centuries, play on the building inside and out and
use it

Men who sunk the pilings and mixed the mortar are laid in graves where
the wind whistles a wild song without words
And so are men who strung the wires and fixed the pipes and tubes and
those who saw it rise floor by floor

Souls of them all are here, even the hod carrier begging at back doors
hundreds of miles away and the bricklayer who went to state's prison
for shooting another man while drunk

(One man fell from a girder and broke his neck at the end of a straight
plunge—he is here—his soul has gone into the stones of the building)

On the office doors from tier to tier—hundreds of names and each name
standing for a face written across with a dead child, a passionate
lover, a driving ambition for a million dollar business or a lobster's
ease of life

Behind the signs on the doors they work and the walls tell nothing from
room to room

Ten-dollar-a-week stenographers take letters from corporation officers,
lawyers, efficiency engineers, and tons of letters go bundled from the
building to all ends of the earth

Smiles and tears of each office girl go into the soul of the building just
the same as the master-men who rule the building

Hands of clocks turn to noon hours and each floor empties its men and
women who go away and eat and come back to work

Toward the end of the afternoon all work slackens and all jobs go slower
as the people feel day closing on them

One by one the floors are emptied . . . 'The uniformed elevator men are
gone Pails clang Scrubbers work, talking in foreign tongues
Broom and water and mop clean from the floors human dust and
spit, and machine grime of the day

Spelled in electric fire on the roof are words telling miles of houses and
people where to buy a thing for money The sign speaks till midnight

Darkness on the hallways Voices echo Silence holds Watchmen
walk slow from floor to floor and try the doors Revolvers bulge from
their hip pockets Steel safes stand in corners Money is stacked
in them

A young watchman leans at a window and sees the lights of barges but
ting their way across a harbor, nets of red and white lanterns in a
railroad yard, and a span of glooms splashed with lines of white and
blurs of crosses and clusters over the sleeping city

By night the skyscraper looms in the smoke and the stars and has a soul

Handfuls

FOG

THE fog comes
on little cat feet

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on

POOL

Out of the fire
Came a man sunken
To less than cinders,
A tea-cup of ashes or so
And I,
The gold in the house,
Winthred into a stiff pool

JAN KUBELIK

Your bow swept over a string, and a long low note quivered to the air.
(A mother of Bohemia sobs over a new child perfect learning to suck
milk)

Your bow ran fast over all the high strings fluttering and wild
(All the girls in Bohemia are laughing on a Sunday afternoon in the hills
with their lovers)

CHOOSE

THE single clenched fist lifted and ready,
Or the open asking hand held out and waiting
Choose
For we meet by one or the other

CRIMSON

CRIMSON is the slow smolder of the cigar end I hold,
Gray is the ash that stiffens and covers all silent the fire
(A great man I know is dead and while he lies in his coffin a gone flame
I sit here in cumbering shadows and smoke and watch my thoughts
come and go)

WHITELIGHT

YOUR whitelight flashes the frost tonight
Moon of the purple and silent west
Remember me one of your lovers of dreams

FLUX

SAND of the sea runs red
Where the sunset reaches and quivers
Sand of the sea runs yellow
Where the moon slants and wavers

KIN

BROTHER, I am fire
Surging under the ocean floor
I shall never meet you, brother—
Not for years, anyhow,

Maybe thousands of years, brother
Then I will warm you,
Hold you close, wrap you in circles,
Use you and change you—
Maybe thousands of years, brother

WHITE SHOULDERS

Your white shoulders
I remember
And your shrug of laughter

Low laughter
Shaken slow
From your white shoulders

LOSSES

I HAVE love
And a child,
A banjo
And shadows
(Losses of God,
All will go
And one day
We will hold
Only the shadows)

TROTHS

YELLOW dust on a bumble
bee's wing,
Grey lights in a woman's
asking eyes,
Red runs in the changing
sunset embers.

I take you and pile high
the memories
Death will break her claws
on some I keep

War Poems

(1914-1915)

KILLERS

I AM singing to you
Soft as a man with a dead child speaks,
Hard as a man in handcuffs,
Held where he cannot move

Under the sun
Are sixteen million men,
Chosen for shining teeth,
Sharp eyes, hard legs,
And a running of young warm blood in their wrists

And a red juice runs on the green grass,
And a red juice soaks the dark soil
And the sixteen million are killing and killing and killing

I never forget them day or night
They beat on my head for memory of them,
They pound on my heart and I cry back to them,
To their homes and women, dreams and games

I wake in the night and smell the trenches,
And hear the low stir of sleepers in lines—
Sixteen million sleepers and pickets in the dark
Some of them long sleepers for always,
Some of them tumbling to sleep tomorrow for always,
Fixed in the drag of the world's heartbreak,
Eating and drinking, toiling on a long job of killing
Sixteen million men

AMONG THE RED GUNS

*After waking at dawn one morning when the wind sang low among dry
leaves in an elm*

AMONG the red guns,
In the hearts of soldiers
Running free blood
In the long, long campaign
Dreams go on

Among the leather saddles,
In the heads of soldiers
Heavy in the wracks and kills
Of all straight fighting
Dreams go on

Among the hot muzzles,
In the hands of soldiers
Brought from flesh-folds of women—
Soft amid the blood and crying—
In all your hearts and heads
Among the guns and saddles and muzzles

Dreams,
Dreams go on,
Out of the dead on their backs,
Broken and no use any more
Dreams of the way and the end go on

IRON

GUNS,
Long, steel guns,
Pointed from the war ships
In the name of the war god
Straight, shining, polished guns,
Clambered over with jackies in white blouses,
Glory of tan faces, tousled hair, white teeth,
Laughing lithe jackies in white blouses,
Sitting on the guns singing war songs, war chanties

Shovels,
Broad, iron shovels,
Scooping out oblong vaults,
Loosening turf and leveling sod

I ask you
To witness—
The shovel is brother to the gun

MURMURINGS IN A FIELD HOSPITAL

*[They picked him up in the grass where he had lain two days in the rain
with a piece of shrapnel in his lungs]*

COME to me only with playthings now
A picture of a singing woman with blue eyes
Standing at a fence of hollyhocks, poppies and sunflowers
Or an old man I remember sitting with children telling stories
Of days that never happened anywhere in the world

No more iron cold and real to handle,
Shaped for a drive straight ahead
Bring me only beautiful useless things
Only old home things touched at sunset in the quiet
And at the window one day in summer
Yellow of the new crock of butter
Stood against the red of new climbing roses
And the world was all playthings

STATISTICS

NAPOLEON shifted,
Restless in the old sarcophagus
And murmured to a watchguard
"Who goes there?"
"Twenty-one million men,
Soldiers, armies, guns,
Twenty-one million
Afoot, horseback,
In the air,
Under the sea "
And Napoleon turned to his sleep
"It is not my world answering,
It is some dreamer who knows not
The world I marched in
From Calais to Moscow"
And he slept on
In the old sarcophagus
While the aeroplanes
Droned their motors
Between Napoleon's mausoleum
And the cool night stars

FIGHT

RED drips from my chin where I have been eating
Not all the blood, nowhere near all, is wiped off my mouth

Clots of red mess my hair
And the tiger, the buffalo, know how

I was a killer
Yes, I am a killer

I come from killing
I go to more

I drive red joy ahead of me from killing
Red gluts and red hungers run in the smears and juices of my inside bones
The child cries for a suck mother and I cry for war

BUTTONS

I HAVE been watching the war map slammed up for advertising in front
of the newspaper office
Buttons—red and yellow buttons—blue and black buttons—are shoved
back and forth across the map

A laughing young man, sunny with freckles,
Climbs a ladder, yells a joke to somebody in the crowd,
And then fixes a yellow button one inch west
And follows the yellow button with a black button one inch west

(Ten thousand men and boys twist on their bodies in a red soak along a
river edge,
Gasping of wounds, calling for water, some rattling death in their throats)
Who would guess what it cost to move two buttons one inch on the war
map here in front of the newspaper office where the freckle-faced
young man is laughing to us?

AND THEY OBEY

SMASH down the cities
Knock the walls to pieces
Break the factories and cathedrals, warehouses and homes
Into loose piles of stone and lumber and black burnt wood
You are the soldiers and we command you

Build up the cities.
Set up the walls again
Put together once more the factories and cathedrals, warehouses and homes
Into buildings for life and labor:
You are workmen and citizens all We command you.

JAWS

SEVEN nations stood with their hands on the jaws of death
It was the first week in August, Nineteen Hundred Fourteen
I was listening, you were listening, the whole world was listening,
And all of us heard a Voice murmuring
 "I am the way and the light,
 He that believeth on me
 Shall not perish
 But shall have everlasting life"
Seven nations listening heard the Voice and answered
 "O Hell!"
The jaws of death began clicking and they go on clicking
 "O Hell!"

SALVAGE

GUNS on the battle lines have pounded now a year between Brussels and
Paris
And, William Morris, when I read your old chapter on the great arches
and naves and little whimsical corners of the Churches of Northern
France—Brr-rr!
I'm glad you're a dead man, William Morris, I'm glad you're down in the
damp and mouldy, only a memory instead of a living man—I'm glad
you're gone
You never lied to us, William Morris, you loved the shape of those stones
piled and carved for you to dream over and wonder because workmen
got joy of life into them,
Workmen in aprons singing while they hammered, and praying, and put-
ting their songs and prayers into the walls and roofs, the bastions and
cornerstones and gargoyles—all their children and kisses of women
and wheat and roses growing
I say, William Morris, I'm glad you're gone, I'm glad you're a dead man
Guns on the battle lines have pounded a year now between Brussels and
Paris.

WARS

IN the old wars drum of hoofs and the beat of shod feet
In the new wars hum of motors and the tread of rubber tires
In the wars to come silent wheels and whirr of rods not yet dreamed out
in the heads of men

In the old wars clutches of short swords and jabs into faces with spears
In the new wars long-range guns and smashed walls, guns running a spit
of metal and men falling in tens and twenties
In the wars to come new silent deaths, new silent hurlers not yet dreamed
out in the heads of men

In the old wars kings quarreling and thousands of men following
In the new wars kings quarreling and millions of men following
In the wars to come kings kicked under the dust and millions of men fol-
lowing great causes not yet dreamed out in the heads of men

The Road and the End

THE ROAD AND THE END

I SHALL foot it
Down the roadway in the dusk,
Where shapes of hunger wander
And the fugitives of pain go by
I shall foot it
In the silence of the morning,
See the night slur into dawn,
Hear the slow great winds arise

Where tall trees flank the way
And shoulder toward the sky

The broken boulders by the road
Shall not commemorate my ruin
Regret shall be the gravel under foot
I shall watch for
Slim birds swift of wing
That go where wind and ranks of thunder
Drive the wild processions of rain

The dust of the traveled road
Shall touch my hands and face

CHOICES

THEY offer you many things,
I a few
Moonlight on the play of fountains at night
With water sparkling a drowsy monotone,
Bare-shouldered, smiling women and talk
And a cross-play of loves and adulteries
And a fear of death
and a remembering of regrets
All this they offer you
I come with
salt and bread
a terrible job of work
and tireless war,
Come and have now
hunger
danger
and hate

GRAVES

I DREAMED one man stood against a thousand,
One man damned as a wrongheaded fool
One year and another he walked the streets,

And a thousand shrugs and hoots
Met him in the shoulders and mouths he passed

He died alone
And only the undertaker came to his funeral

Flowers grow over his grave anod in the wind,
And over the graves of the thousand, too,
The flowers grow anod in the wind

Flowers and the wind,
Flowers anod over the graves of the dead,
Petals of red, leaves of yellow, streaks of white,
Masses of purple sagging
I love you and your great way of forgetting

AZTEC MASK

I WANTED a man's face looking into the jaws and throat of life
With something proud on his face, so proud no smash of the jaws,
No gulp of the throat leaves the face in the end
With anything else than the old proud look
 Even to the finish, dumped in the dust,
 Lost among the used-up cinders,
 This face, men would say, is a flash,
 Is laid on bones taken from the ribs of the earth,
 Ready for the hammers of changing, changing years,
 Ready for the sleeping, sleeping years of silence
 Ready for the dust and fire and wind
I wanted this face and I saw it today in an Aztec mask
A cry out of storm and dark, a red yell and a purple prayer,
A beaten shape of ashes
 waiting the sunrise or night,
 something or nothing,
 proud-mouthed,
 proud-eyed gambler

MOMUS

MOMUS is the name men give your face,
The brag of its tone, like a long low steamboat whistle
Finding a way mid mist on a shoreland,
Where gray rocks let the salt water shatter spray
Against horizons purple, silent

Yes, Momus,
Men have flung your face in bronze
To gaze in gargoyles downward on a street-whirl of folk
They were artists did this, shaped your sad mouth,
Gave you a tall forehead slanted with calm, broad wisdom,
All your lips to the corners and your cheeks to the high bones
Thrown over and through with a smile that forever wishes and wishes,
purple, silent, fled from all the iron things of life, evaded like a sought
bandit, gone into dreams, by God

I wonder, Momus,
Whether shadows of the dead sit somewhere and look with deep laughter
On men who play in terrible earnest the old, known, solemn repetitions
of history
A droning monotone soft as sea laughter hovers from your kindness of
bronze,
You give me the human ease of a mountain peak, purple, silent,
Granite shoulders heaving above the earth curves,
Careless eye-witness of the spawning tides of men and women
Swarming always in a drift of millions to the dust of toil, the salt of tears,
And blood drops of undiminishing war

THE ANSWER

You have spoken the answer
A child searches far sometimes
Into the red dust
On a dark rose leaf
And so you have gone far
For the answer is
Silence

In the republic
Of the winking stars
 and spent cataclysms
Sure we are it is off there the answer is hidden and folded over,
Sleeping in the sun, careless whether it is Sunday or any other day of the
 week,

Knowing silence will bring all one way or another

Have we not seen
Purple of the pansy
 out of the mulch
 and mold
 crawl
 into a dusk
 of velvet?
 blur of yellow?
Almost we thought from nowhere but it was the silence,
 the future,
 working

TO A DEAD MAN

OVER the dead line we have called to you
To come across with a word to us,
Some beaten whisper of what happens
Where you are over the dead line
Deaf to our calls and voiceless

The flickering shadows have not answered
Nor your lips sent a signal
Whether love talks and roses grow
And the sun breaks at morning
Splattering the sea with crimson

UNDER

I

I AM the undertow
Washing tides of power
Battering the pillars
Under your things of high law

II

I am a sleepless
Slowfaring eater,
Maker of rust and rot
In your bastioned fastenings,
Caissons deep

III

I am the Law
Older than you
And your builders proud

I am deaf
In all days
Whether you
Say "Yes" or "No"

I am the crumbler
Tomorrow

A SPHINX

CLOSE-MOUTHED you sat five thousand years and never let out a whisper
Processions came by, marchers, asking questions you answered with gray
eyes never blinking, shut lips never talking
Not one croak of anything you know has come from your cat crouch of
ages
I am one of those who know all you know and I keep my questions. I
know the answers you hold

WHO AM I?

My head knocks against the stars
My feet are on the hilltops
My finger-tips are in the valleys and shores of universal life
Down in the sounding foam of primal things I reach my hands and play
 with pebbles of destiny
I have been to hell and back many times
I know all about heaven, for I have talked with God
I dabble in the blood and guts of the terrible
I know the passionate seizure of beauty
And the marvelous rebellion of man at all signs reading "Keep Off"

My name is Truth and I am the most elusive captive in the universe

OUR PRAYER OF THANKS

For the gladness here where the sun is shining at evening on the weeds at
 the river,
 Our prayer of thanks

For the laughter of children who tumble barefooted and bareheaded in
 the summer grass,
 Our prayer of thanks

For the sunset and the stars, the women and the white arms that hold us,
 Our prayer of thanks

God,
If you are deaf and blind, if this is all lost to you,
God, if the dead in their coffins amid the silver handles on the edge of
 town, or the reckless dead of war days thrown unknown in pits, if
 these dead are forever deaf and blind and lost,
 Our prayer of thanks.

God,
The game is all your way, the secrets and the signals and the system, and
 so for the break of the game and the first play and the last.
 Our prayer of thanks

Fogs and Fires

AT A WINDOW

GIVE me hunger,
O you gods that sit and give
The world its orders
Give me hunger, pain and want,
Shut me out with shame and failure
From your doors of gold and fame,
Give me your shabbiest, weariest hunger!

But leave me a little love,
A voice to speak to me in the day end,
A hand to touch me in the dark room
Breaking the long loneliness
In the dusk of day-shapes
Blurring the sunset,
One little wandering, western star
Thrust out from the changing shores of shadow
Let me go to the window,
Watch there the day-shapes of dusk
And wait and know the coming
Of a little love.

UNDER THE HARVEST MOON

UNDER the harvest moon,
When the soft silver
Drips shimmering
Over the garden nights,

Death, the gray mocker,
Comes and whispers to you
As a beautiful friend
Who remembers

Under the summer roses
When the flagrant crimson
Lurks in the dusk
Of the wild red leaves,
Love, with little hands,
Comes and touches you
With a thousand memories,
And asks you
Beautiful, unanswerable questions

THE GREAT HUNT

I CANNOT tell you now,
When the wind's drive and whirl
Blow me along no longer,
And the wind's a whisper at last—
Maybe I'll tell you then—
some other time

When the rose's flash to the sunset
Reels to the rack and the twist,
And the rose is a red bygone,
When the face I love is going
And the gate to the end shall clang,
And it's no use to beckon or say, "So long"—
Maybe I'll tell you then—
some other time

I never knew any more beautiful than you
I have hunted you under my thoughts,
I have broken down under the wind
And into the roses looking for you
I shall never find any
greater than you

MONOTONE

THE monotone of the rain is beautiful,
And the sudden rise and slow relapse
Of the long multitudinous rain

The sun on the hills is beautiful,
Or a captured sunset sea-flung,
Bannered with fire and gold

A face I know is beautiful—
With fire and gold of sky and sea,
And the peace of long warm rain

JOY

LET a joy keep you
Reach out your hands
And take it when it runs by,
As the Apache dancer
Clutches his woman
I have seen them
Live long and laugh loud,
Sent on singing, singing,
Smashed to the heart
Under the ribs
With a terrible love
Joy always,
Joy everywhere—
Let joy kill you!
Keep away from the little deaths

SHIRT

I REMEMBER once I ran after you and tagged the fluttering shirt of you in
the wind
Once many days ago I drank a glassful of something and the picture of
you shivered and slid on top of the stuff
And again it was nobody else but you I heard in the singing voice of a care-
less humming woman
One night when I sat with chums telling stories at a bonfire flickering red
embers, in a language its own talking to a spread of white stars
It was you that slunk laughing
in the clumsy staggering shadows
Broken answers of remembrance let me know you are alive with a peering
phantom face behind a doorway somewhere in the city's push and furv
Or under a pack of moss and leaves waiting in silence under a twist of
oaken arms ready as ever to run away again when I tag the fluttering
shirt of you

AZTEC

You came from the Aztecs
With a copper on your fore-arms
Tawnier than a sunset
Saying good-by to an even river

And I said, you remember,
Those fore-arms of yours
Were finer than bronzes
And you were glad

It was tears
And a path west
and a home-going
when I asked
Why there were scars of worn gold
Where a man's ring was fixed once

On your third finger
And I call you
To come back
before the days are longer

TWO

MEMORY of you is a blue spear of flower
I cannot remember the name of it
Alongside a bold dripping poppy is fire and silk
And they cover you

BACK YARD

SHINE on, O moon of summer
Shine to the leaves of grass, catalpa and oak,
All silver under your rain tonight

An Italian boy is sending songs to you tonight from an accordion
A Polish boy is out with his best girl, they marry next month, tonight they
are throwing you kisses

An old man next door is dreaming over a sheen that sits in a cherry tree
in his back yard

The clocks say I must go—I stay here sitting on the back porch drinking
white thoughts you rain down

Shine on, O moon,
Shake out more and more silver changes

ON THE BREAKWATER

ON the breakwater in the summer dark, a man and a girl are sitting,
She across his knee and they are looking face into face
Talking to each other without words, singing rhythms in silence to each
other

A funnel of white ranges the blue dusk from an outgoing boat,
Playing its searchlight, puzzled, abrupt, over a streak of green,
And two on the breakwater keep their silence, she on his knee

MASK

FLING your red scarf faster and faster, dancer
It is summer and the sun loves a million green leaves, masses of green
Your red scarf flashes across them calling and a-calling
The silk and flare of it is a great soprano leading a chorus
Carried along in a rouse of voices reaching for the heart of the world
Your toes are singing to meet the song of your arms

Let the red scarf go swifter
Summer and the sun command you

PEARL FOG

OPEN the door now
Go roll up the collar of your coat
To walk in the changing scarf of mist

Tell your sins here to the pearl fog
And know for once a deepening night
Strange as the half-meanings
Alurk in a wise woman's mousey eyes

Yes, tell your sins
And know how careless a pearl fog is
Of the laws you have broken

I SANG

I SANG to you and the moon
But only the moon remembers
I sang

O reckless free-hearted
 free-throated rhythms,
Even the moon remembers them
 And is kind to me

FOLLIES

SHAKEN,
The blossoms of lilac,
And shattered,
The atoms of purple
Green dip the leaves,
Darker the bark,
Longer the shadows

Sheer lines of poplar
Shimmer with masses of silver
And down in a garden old with years
And broken walls of ruin and story,
Roses rise with red rain-memories
May!
In the open world
The sun comes and finds your face,
Remembering all

JUNE

PAULA is digging and shaping the loam of a salvia,
Scarlet Chinese talker of summer
Two petals of crabapple blossom blow fallen in Paula's hair,
And fluff of white from a cottonwood.

NOCTURNE IN A DESERTED BRICKYARD

STUFF of the moon
Runs on the lapping sand
Out to the longest shadows

Under the curving willows,
And round the creep of the wave line,
Fluxions of yellow and dusk on the waters
Make a wide dreaming pansy of an old pond in the night

HYDRANGEAS

DRAGOONS, I tell you the white hydrangeas turn rust and go soon
Already mid-September a line of brown runs over them
One` sunset after another tracks the faces, the petals
Waiting, they look over the fence for what way they go

THEME IN YELLOW

I spot the hills
With yellow balls in autumn
I light the prairie cornfields
Orange and tawny gold clusters
And I am called pumpkins
On the last of October
When dusk is fallen
Children join hands
And circle round me
Singing ghost songs
And love to the harvest moon,
I am a jack-o'-lantern
With terrible teeth
And the children know
I am fooling

BETWEEN TWO HILLS

BETWEEN two hills
The old town stands.
The houses loom
And the roofs and trees
And the dusk and the dark,

The damp and the dew
Are there

The prayers are said
And the people rest
For sleep is there
And the touch of dreams
Is over all

LAST ANSWERS

I WROTE a poem on the mist
And a woman asked me what I meant by it.
I had thought till then only of the beauty of the mist, how pearl and
gray of it mix and reel,
And change the drab shanties with lighted lamps at evening into points
of mystery quivering with color

I answered
The whole world was mist once long ago and some day it will all go back
to mist,
Our skulls and lungs are more water than bone and tissue
And all poets love dust and mist because all the last answers
Go running back to dust and mist

WINDOW

NIGHT from a railroad car window
Is a great, dark, soft thing
Broken across with slashes of light

YOUNG SEA

THE sea is never still
It pounds on the shore
Restless as a young heart,
Hunting

The sea speaks
And only the stormy hearts
Know what it says
It is the face
 of a rough mother speaking

The sea is young
One storm cleans all the hoar
And loosens the age of it
I hear it laughing, reckless

They love the sea,
Men who ride on it
And know they will die
Under the salt of it

Let only the young come,
 Says the sea
Let them kiss my face
 And hear me
I am the last word
 And I tell
Where storms and stars come from.

BONES

SLING me under the sea
Pack me down in the salt and wet
No farmer's plow shall touch my bones.
No Hamlet hold my jaws and speak
How jokes are gone and empty is my mouth
Long, green-eyed scavengers shall pick my eyes,
Purple fish play hide-and-seek,
And I shall be song of thunder, crash of sea,
Down on the floors of salt and wet
 Sling me . . . under the sea

PALS

TAKE a hold now
On the silver handles here,
Six silver handles,
One for each of his old pals

Take hold
And lift him down the stairs,
Put him on the rollers
Over the floor of the hearse

Take him on the last haul,
To the cold straight house,
The level even house,
To the last house of all

The dead say nothing
And the dead know much
And the dead hold under their tongues
A locked-up story

CHILD

THE young child, Christ, is straight and wise
And asks questions of the old men, questions
Found under running water for all children
And found under shadows thrown on still waters
By tall trees looking downward, old and gnarled
Found to the eyes of children alone, untold,
Singing a low song in the loneliness
And the young child, Christ, goes on asking
And the old men answer nothing and only know love
For the young child Christ, straight and wise

POPPIES

SHE loves blood-red poppies for a garden to walk in
In a loose white gown she walks
 and a new child tugs at cords in her body
Her head to the west at evening when the dew is creeping,
A shudder of gladness runs in her bones and toisal fiber
She loves blood-red poppies for a garden to walk in

CHILD MOON

THE child's wonder
At the old moon
Comes back nightly
She points her finger
To the far silent yellow thing
Shining through the branches
Filtering on the leaves a golden sand,
Crying with her little tongue, "See the moon!"
And in her bed fading to sleep
With babblings of the moon on her little mouth.

MARGARET

MANY birds and the beating of wings
Make a flinging reckless hum
In the early morning at the rocks
Above the blue pool
Where the gray shadows swim lazy

In your blue eyes, O reckless child,
I saw today many little wild wishes,
Eager as the great morning

Shadows

POEMS DONE ON A LATE NIGHT CAR

I CHICKENS

I AM The Great White Way of the city
When you ask what is my desire, I answer
"Girls fresh as country wild flowers,
With young faces tired of the cows and barns,
Eager in their eyes as the dawn to find my mysteries,
Slender supple girls with shapely legs,
Lure in the arch of their little shoulders
And wisdom from the prairies to cry only softly at the ashes of my mysteries"

II USED UP

*Lines based on certain regrets that come with rumination upon the
painted faces of women on North Clark Street, Chicago*

Roses,
Red roses,
Crushed
In the rain and wind
Like mouths of women
Beaten by the fists of
Men using them
O little roses
And broken leaves
And petal wisps
You that so flung your crimson
To the sun
Only yesterday

III HOME

Here is a thing my heart wishes the world had more of
I heard it in the air of one night when I listened
To a mother singing softly to a child restless and angry in the darkness

IT IS MUCH

WOMEN of night life amid the lights
Where the line of your full, round throats
Matches in gleam the glint of your eyes
And the ring of your heart-deep laughter
It is much to be warm and sure of tomorrow.

Women of night life along the shadows,
Lean at your throats and skulking the walls,
Gaunt as a bitch worn to the bone,
Under the paint of your smiling faces
It is much to be warm and sure of tomorrow

TRAFFICKER

AMONG the shadows where two streets cross,
A woman lurks in the dark and waits
To move on when a policeman heaves in view
Smiling a broken smile from a face
Painted over haggard bones and desperate eyes,
All night she offers passers-by what they will
Of her beauty wasted, body faded, claims gone,
And no takers

HARRISON STREET COURT

I HEARD a woman's lips
Speaking to a companion
Say these words

"A woman what hustles
Never keeps nothin'
For all her hustlin'
Somebody always gets
What she goes on the street for
If it ain't a pimp
It's a bull what gets it
I been hustlin' now
Till I ain't much good any more
I got nothin' to show for it
Some man got it all,
Every night's hustlin' I ever did"

SOILED DOVE

LET us be honest, the lady was not a harlot until she married a corporation
lawyer who picked her from a Ziegfeld chorus
Before then she never took anybody's money and paid for her silk
stockings out of what she earned singing and dancing
She loved one man and he loved six women and the game was changing
her looks, calling for more and more massage money and high coin
for the beauty doctors
Now she drives a long, underslung motor car all by herself, reads in the
day's papers what her husband is doing to the inter-state commerce
commission, requires a larger corsage from year to year, and wonders
sometimes how one man is coming along with six women

JUNGHEIMER'S

IN western fields of corn and northern timber lands,
They talk about me, a saloon with a soul,
The soft red lights, the long curving bar,
The leather seats and dim corners,
Tall brass spittoons, a nigger cutting ham,
And the painting of a woman half-dressed thrown reckless across a bed
after a night of booze and riots

GONE

EVERYBODY loved Chick Lorimer in our town
Far off
Everybody loved her
So we all love a wild girl keeping a hold
On a dream she wants
Nobody knows now where Chick Lorimer went
Nobody knows why she packed her trunk a few old things
And is gone,
Gone with her little chin
Thrust ahead of her
And her soft hair blowing careless
From under a wide hat,
Dancer, singer, a laughing passionate lover

Were there ten men or a hundred hunting Chick?
Were there five men or fifty with aching hearts?
Everybody loved Chick Lorimer
Nobody knows where she's gone

Other Days

(1900-1910)

DREAMS IN THE DUSK

DREAMS in the dusk,
Only dreams closing the day
And with the day's close going back
To the gray things, the dark things,
The far, deep things of dreamland

Dreams, only dreams in the dusk,
Only the old remembered pictures
Of lost days when the day's loss
Wrote in tears the heart's loss

Tears and loss and broken dreams
May find your heart at dusk

DOCKS

STROLLING along
By the teeming docks,
I watch the ships put out.
Black ships that heave and lunge
And move like mastodons
Arising from lethargic sleep

The fathomed harbor
Calls them not nor dares
Them to a strain of action,
But outward, on and outward,

Sounding low-reverberating calls,
Shaggy in the half-lit distance,
They pass the pointed headland,
View the wide, far-lifting wilderness
And leap with cumulative speed
To test the challenge of the sea

Plunging,
Doggedly onward plunging,
Into salt and mist and foam and sun

ALL DAY LONG

ALL day long in fog and wind,
The waves have flung their beating crests
Against the palisades of adamant
 My boy, he went to sea, long and long ago,
 Curls of brown were slipping underneath his cap,
 He looked at me from blue and steely eyes,
 Natty, straight and true, he stepped away,
 My boy, he went to sea
All day long in fog and wind,
The waves have flung their beating crests
Against the palisades of adamant

WAITING

TODAY I will let the old boat stand
Where the sweep of the harbor tide comes in
To the pulse of a far, deep-steady sway
And I will rest and dream and sit on the deck
 Watching the world go by
And take my pay for many hard days gone I remember

I will choose what clouds I like
In the great white fleets that wander the blue
As I lie on my back or loaf at the rail
And I will listen as the veering winds kiss me and fold me
And put on my brow the touch of the world's great will

Daybreak will hear the heart of the boat beat,
Engine throb and piston play
In the quiver and leap at call of life
Tomorrow we move in the gaps and heights
On changing floors of unlevel seas
And no man shall stop us and no man follow
For ours is the quest of an unknown shore
And we are husky and lusty and shouting-gay

FROM THE SHORE

A LONE gray bird,
Dim-dipping, far-flying,
Alone in the shadows and grandeurs and tumults
Of night and the sea
And the stars and storms

Out over the darkness it wavers and hovers,
Out into the gloom it swings and batters,
Out into the wind and the rain and the vast,
Out into the pit of a great black world,
Where fogs are at battle, sky-driven, sea-blown,
Love of mist and rapture of flight,
Glories of chance and hazards of death
On its eager and palpitant wings

Out into the deep of the great dark world,
Beyond the long borders where foam and drift
Of the sundering waves are lost and gone
On the tides that plunge and rear and crumble

UPLANDS IN MAY

WONDER as of old things
Fresh and fair come back
Hangs over pasture and road
Lush in the lowland grasses rise
And upland beckons to upland
The great strong hills are humble.

DREAM GIRL

You will come one day in a waver of love,
Tender as dew, impetuous as rain,
The tan of the sun will be on your skin,
The purr of the breeze in your murmuring speech,
You will pose with a hill-flower grace

You will come, with your slim, expressive arms,
A poise of the head no sculptor has caught
And nuances spoken with shoulder and neck,
Your face in a pass-and-repass of moods
As many as skies in delicate change
Of cloud and blue and flimmering sun

Yet,

You may not come, O girl of a dream,
We may but pass as the world goes by
And take from a look of eyes into eyes,
A film of hope and a memoried day

PLOWBOY

AFTER the last red sunset glimmer,
Black on the line of a low hill rise,
Formed into moving shadows, I saw
A plowboy and two horses lined against the gray,
Plowing in the dusk the last furrow
The turf had a gleam of brown,
And smell of soil was in the air,
And, cool and moist, a haze of April

I shall remember you long,
Plowboy and horses against the sky in shadow
I shall remember you and the picture
You made for me,
Turning the turf in the dusk
And haze of an April gloaming

BROADWAY

I SHALL never forget you, Broadway
Your golden and calling lights

I'll remember you long,
Tall-walled river of rush and play

Hearts that know you hate you
And lips that have given you laughter
Have gone to their ashes of life and its roses,
Cursing the dreams that were lost
In the dust of your harsh and trampled stones

OLD WOMAN

THE owl-car clatters along, dogged by the echo
From building and battered paving-stone,
The headlight scoffs at the mist
And fixes its yellow rays in the cold slow rain,
Against a pane I press my forehead
And drowsily look on the walls and sidewalks

The headlight finds the way
And life is gone from the wet and the welter—
Only an old woman, bloated, disheveled and bleared
Far-wandered waif of other days,
Huddles for sleep in a doorway,
Homeless

NOON HOUR

SHE sits in the dust at the walls
And makes cigars,
Bending at the bench
With fingers wage-anxious,
Changing her sweat for the day's pay.

Now the noon hour has come,
And she leans with her bare arms
On the window-sill over the river,
Leans and feels at her throat
Cool-moving things out of the free open ways

At her throat and eyes and nostrils
The touch and the blowing cool
Of great free ways beyond the walls

'BOES

I WAITED today for a freight train to pass
Cattle cars with steers butting their horns against the bars, went by
And a half a dozen hoboes stood on bumpers between cars
Well, the cattle are respectable, I thought
Every steer has its transportation paid for by the farmer sending it to
market,
While the hoboes are law-breakers in riding a railroad train without a
ticket
It reminded me of ten days I spent in the Allegheny County jail in
Pittsburgh
I got ten days even though I was a veteran of the Spanish-American war
Cooped in the same cell with me was an old man, a bricklayer and a
booze-fighter
But it just happened he, too, was a veteran soldier, and he had fought
to preserve the Union and free the niggers
We were three in all, the other being a Lithuanian who got drunk on
payday at the steel works and got to fighting a policeman,
All the clothes he had was a shirt, pants and shoes—somebody got his
hat and coat and what money he had left over when he got drunk

UNDER A TELEPHONE POLE

I AM a copper wire slung in the air,
Slim against the sun I make not even a clear line of shadow
Night and day I keep singing—humming and thrumming

It is love and war and money, it is the fighting and the tears, the work
and want,
Death and laughter of men and women passing through me, carrier of
your speech,
In the rain and the wet dripping, in the dawn and the shine drying,
A copper wire

I AM THE PEOPLE, THE MOB

I AM the people—the mob—the crowd—the mass
Do you know that all the great work of the world is done through me?
I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the world's food and
clothes
I am the audience that witnesses history The Napoleons come from me
and the Lincolns They die And then I send forth more Napoleons
and Lincolns
I am the seed ground I am a prairie that will stand for much plowing
Terrible storms pass over me I forget The best of me is sucked out
and wasted I forget Everything but Death comes to me and makes
me work and give up what I have And I forget
Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a few red drops for history
to remember Then—I forget
When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the People, use the
lessons of yesterday and no longer forget who robbed me last year,
who played me for a fool—then there will be no speaker in all the
world say the name “The People,” with any fleck of a sneer in his
voice or any far-off smile of derision
The mob—the crowd—the mass—will arrive then

GOVERNMENT

THE Government—I heard about the Government and I went out to find
it I said I would look closely at it when I saw it
Then I saw a policeman dragging a drunken man to the calaboose It
was the Government in action
I saw a ward alderman slip into an office one morning and talk with a
judge Later in the day the judge dismissed a case against a pickpocket

who was a live ward worker for the alderman Again I saw this was
the Government, doing things
I saw militiamen level their rifles at a crowd of workingmen who were
trying to get other workingmen to stay away from a shop where there
was a strike on Government in action

Everywhere I saw that Government is a thing made of men, that Gov-
ernment has blood and bones, it is many mouths whispering into
many ears, sending telegrams, aiming rifles, writing orders, saying
"yes" and "no "

Government dies as the men who form it die and are laid away in their
graves and the new Government that comes after is human, made
of heartbeats of blood, ambitions, lusts, and money running through
it all, money paid and money taken, and money covered up and
spoken of with hushed voices

A Government is just as secret and mysterious and sensitive as any
human sinner carrying a load of germs, traditions and corpuscles
handed down from fathers and mothers away back

LANGUAGES

THERE are no handles upon a language
Whereby men take hold of it
And mark it with signs for its remembrance
It is a river, this language,
Once in a thousand years
Breaking a new course
Changing its way to the ocean
It is mountain effluvia
Moving to valleys
And from nation to nation
Crossing borders and mixing
Languages die like rivers
Words wrapped round your tongue today
And broken to shape of thought
Between your teeth and lips speaking
Now and today
Shall be faded hieroglyphics

Ten thousand years from now
Sing—and singing—remember
Your song dies and changes
And is not here tomorrow
Any more than the wind
Blowing ten thousand years ago

LETTERS TO DEAD IMAGISTS

EMILY DICKINSON

You gave us the bumblebee who has a soul,
The everlasting traveler among the hollyhocks,
And how God plays around a back yard garden

STEVIE CRANE

War is kind and we never knew the kindness of war till you came,
Nor the black riders and clashes of spear and shield out of the sea,
Nor the mumblings and shots that rise from dreams on call

SHEEP

THOUSANDS of sheep, soft-footed, black-nosed sheep—one by one going up the hill and over the fence—one by one four-footed pattering up and over—one by one wiggling their stub tails as they take the short jump and go over—one by one silently unless for the multitudinous drumming of their hoofs as they move on and go over—thousands and thousands of them in the gray haze of evening just after sundown—one by one slanting in a long line to pass over the hill—

I am the slow, long-legged Sleepyman and I love you sheep in Persia, California, Argentina, Australia, or Spain—you are the thoughts that help me when I, the Sleepyman, lay my hands on the eyelids of the children of the world at eight o'clock every night—you thousands and thousands of sheep in a procession of dusk making an endless multitudinous drumming on the hills with your hoofs

THE RED SON

I LOVE your faces I saw the many years
I drank your milk and filled my mouth
With your home talk, slept in your house
And was one of you

But a fire burns in my heart
Under the ribs where pulses thud
And fitting between bones of skull
Is the push, the endless mysterious command,
Saying

"I leave you behind—
You for the little hills and the years all alike,
You with your patient cows and old houses
Protected from the rain,
I am going away and I never come back to you,
Craggs and high rough places call me,
Great places of death
Where men go empty handed
And pass over smiling
To the star-drift on the horizon rim
My last whisper shall be alone, unknown,
I shall go to the city and fight against it,
And make it give me passwords
Of luck and love, women worth dying for,
And money

I go where you wist not of
Nor I nor any man nor woman
I only know I go to storms
Grappling against things wet and naked"
There is no pity of it and no blame
None of us is in the wrong
After all it is only this

You for the little hills and I go away

THE MIST

I AM the mist, the impalpable mist,
Back of the thing you seek
My arms are long,
Long as the reach of time and space

Some toil and toil, believing,
Looking now and again on my face,
Catching a vital, olden glory

But no one passes me,
I tangle and snare them all
I am the cause of the Sphinx,
The voiceless, baffled, patient Sphinx

I was at the first of things,
I will be at the last
 I am the primal mist
 And no man passes me,
 My long impalpable arms
 Bar them all

THE JUNK MAN

I AM glad God saw Death
And gave Death a job taking care of all who are tired of living

When all the wheels in a clock are worn and slow and the connections
 loose

And the clock goes on ticking and telling the wrong time from hour to
 hour

And people around the house joke about what a bum clock it is,
How glad the clock is when the big Junk Man drives his wagon
Up to the house and puts his arms around the clock and says

 "You don't belong here,

You gotta come
Along with me,"
How glad the clock is then, when it feels the arms of the Junk Man close
around it and carry it away

SILVER NAILS

A MAN was crucified He came to the city a stranger, was accused, and
nailed to a cross He lingered hanging Laughed at the crowd "The nails
are iron," he said "You are cheap In my country when we crucify we use
silver nails " So he went jeering They did not understand him at first
Later they talked about him in changed voices in the saloons, bowling
alleys, and churches It came over them every man is crucified only once
in his life and the law of humanity dictates silver nails be used for the job
A statue was erected to him in a public square Not having gathered his
name when he was among them, they wrote him as John Silvernail on the
statue

GYPSY

I ASKED a gypsy pal
To imitate an old image
And speak old wisdom
She drew in her chin,
Made her neck and head
The top piece of a Nile obelisk
and said
Snatch off the gag from thy mouth, child,
And be free to keep silence
Tell no man anything for no man listens,
Yet hold thy lips ready to speak.

CORNHUSKERS

TO
JANET AND MARGARET

Cornhuskers

PRAIRIE

I was born on the prairie and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover,
the eyes of its women, gave me a song and a slogan

Here the water went down, the icebergs slid with gravel, the gaps and
the valleys hissed, and the black loam came, and the yellow sandy
loam

Here between the sheds of the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachians,
here now a morning star fixes a fire sign over the timber claims and
cow pastures, the corn belt, the cotton belt, the cattle ranches

Here the gray geese go five hundred miles and back with a wind under
their wings honking the cry for a new home

Here I know I will hanker after nothing so much as one more sunrise or a
sky moon of fire doubled to a river moon of water

The prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I rest easy
in the prairie arms, on the prairie heart

After the sunburn of the day
handling a pitchfork at a hayrack,
after the eggs and biscuit and coffee,
the pearl-gray haystacks
in the gloaming
are cool prayers
to the harvest hands

In the city among the walls the overland passenger train is choked and
the pistons hiss and the wheels curse

On the prairie the overland flits on phantom wheels and the sky and
the soil between them muffle the pistons and cheer the wheels

I am here when the cities are gone
I am here before the cities come
I nourished the lonely men on horses
I will keep the laughing men who ride iron
I am dust of men

The running water babbled to the deer, the cottontail, the gopher
You came in wagons, making streets and schools,
Kin of the ax and rifle, kin of the plow and horse,
Singing *Yankee Doodle*, *Old Dan Tucker*, *Turkey in the Straw*,
You in the coonskin cap at a log house door hearing a lone wolf howl,
You at a sod house door reading the blizzards and chinooks let loose
from Medicine Hat,

I am dust of your dust, as I am brother and mother
To the copper faces, the worker in flint and clay,
The singing women and their sons a thousand years ago
Marching single file the timber and the plain

I hold the dust of these amid changing stars.
I last while old wars are fought, while peace broods mother-like,
While new wars arise and the fresh killings of young men
I fed the boys who went to France in great dark days
Appomattox is a beautiful word to me and so is Valley Forge and the
Marne and Verdun,
I who have seen the red births and the red deaths
Of sons and daughters, I take peace or war, I say nothing and wait

Have you seen a red sunset drip over one of my cornfields, the shore of
night stars, the wave lines of dawn up a wheat valley?
Have you heard my threshing crews yelling in the chaff of a strawpile
and the running wheat of the wagonboards, my cornhuskers, my
harvest hands hauling crops, singing dreams of women, worlds,
horizons?

Rivers cut a path on flat lands
The mountains stand up

The salt oceans press in
And push on the coast lines
The sun, the wind, bring rain
And I know what the rainbow writes across the east or
west in a half-circle
A love-letter pledge to come again

Towns on the Soo Line,
Towns on the Big Muddy,
Laugh at each other for cubs
And tease as children

Omaha and Kansas City, Minneapolis and St Paul, sisters in a house
together, throwing slang, growing up
Towns in the Ozarks, Dakota wheat towns, Wichita, Peoria, Buffalo, sis-
ters throwing slang, growing up

Out of prairie-brown grass crossed with a streamer of wigwam smoke—
out of a smoke pillar, a blue promise—out of wild ducks woven in
greens and purples—
Here I saw a city rise and say to the peoples round the world Listen, I am
strong, I know what I want
Out of log houses and stumps—canoes stripped from tree-sides—flat-
boats coaxed with an ax from the timber claims—in the years when
the red and the white men met—the houses and streets rose

A thousand red men cried and went away to new places for corn and
women a million white men came and put up skyscrapers, threw
out rails and wires, feelers to the salt sea now the smokestacks bite
the skyline with stub teeth

In an early year the call of a wild duck woven in greens and purples
now the river's chatter, the police patrol, the song-whistle of the
steamboat

To a man across a thousand years I offer a handshake
I say to him Brother, make the story short, for the stretch of a thou-
sand years is short

What brothers these in the dark?
What eaves of skyscrapers against a smoke moon?
These chimneys shaking on the lumber shanties
When the coal boats plow by on the river—
The hunched shoulders of the grain elevators—
The flame sprockets of the sheet steel mills
And the men in the rolling mills with their shirts off
Playing their flesh arms against the twisting wrists of steel
 what brothers these
 in the dark
 of a thousand years?

A headlight searches a snowstorm
A funnel of white light shoots from over the pilot of the Pioneer Limited crossing Wisconsin

In the morning hours, in the dawn,
The sun puts out the stars of the sky
And the headlight of the Limited train

The fireman waves his hand to a country school teacher on a bobsled
A boy, yellow hair, red scarf and mittens, on the bobsled, in his lunch
 box a pork chop sandwich and a V of gooseberry pie

The horses fathom a snow to their knees
Snow hats are on the rolling prairie hills.
The Mississippi bluffs wear snow hats

Keep your hogs on changing corn and mashies of grain,
 O farmerman
 Cram their insides till they waddle on short legs
 Under the drums of bellies, hams of fat
 Kill your hogs with a knife slit under the ear
 Hack them with cleavers
 Hang them with hooks in the hind legs

. . .

A wagonload of radishes on a summer morning
Sprinkles of dew on the crimson-purple balls

The farmer on the seat dangles the reins on the rumps of dapple-gray
horses

The farmer's daughter with a basket of eggs dreams of a new hat to
wear to the county fair

On the left- and right-hand side of the road,
Marching corn—

I saw it knee high weeks ago—now it is head high—tassels of red silk
creep at the ends of the ears

I am the prairie, mother of men, waiting

They are mine, the threshing crews eating beefsteak, the farmboys driv-
ing steers to the railroad cattle pens

They are mine, the crowds of people at a Fourth of July basket picnic,
listening to a lawyer read the Declaration of Independence, watch-
ing the pinwheels and Roman candles at night, the young men and
women two by two hunting the bypaths and kissing-bridges

They are mine, the horses looking over a fence in the frost of late Octo-
ber saying good morning to the horses hauling wagons of rutabaga
to market

They are mine, the old zigzag rail fences, the new barbwire

The cornhuskers wear leather on their hands

There is no let-up to the wind

Blue bandanas are knotted at the ruddy chins

Falltime and winter apples take on the smolder of the five-o'clock No-
vember sunset falltime, leaves, bonfires, stubble, the old things go,
and the earth is grizzled

The land and the people hold memories, even among the anthills and
the angleworms, among the toads and woodroaches—among grave-
stone writings rubbed out by the rain—they keep old things that
never grow old

The frost loosens cornhusks

The sun, the rain, the wind

loosen cornhusks

The men and women are helpers

They are all cornhuskers together
I see them late in the western evening
in a smoke-red dust

The phantom of a yellow rooster flaunting a scarlet comb, on top of a
dung pile crying hallelujah to the streaks of daylight,
The phantom of an old hunting dog nosing in the underbrush for musk-
rats, barking at a coon in a treetop at midnight, chewing a bone,
chasing his tail round a corncrib,
The phantom of an old workhorse taking the steel point of a plow
across a forty-acre field in spring, hitched to a harrow in summer,
hitched to a wagon among cornshocks in fall,
These phantoms come into the talk and wonder of people on the front
porch of a farmhouse late summer nights
"The shapes that are gone are here," said an old man with a cob pipe
in his teeth one night in Kansas with a hot wind on the alfalfa

Look at six eggs
In a mockingbird's nest

Listen to six mockingbirds
Flinging follies of O-be-joyful
Over the marshes and uplands

Look at songs
Hidden in eggs

. . .

When the morning sun is on the trumpet-vine blossoms, sing at the
kitchen pans. Shout All Over God's Heaven
When the rain slants on the potato hills and the sun plays a silver shaft
on the last shower, sing to the bush at the backyard fence Mighty
Lak a Rose
When the icy sleet pounds on the storm windows and the house lifts
to a great breath, sing for the outside hills The Ole Sheep Done
Know the Road, the Young Lambs Must Find the Way.

Spring slips back with a girl face calling always "Any new songs for
me? Any new songs?"

O prairie girl, be lonely, singing, dreaming, waiting—your lover comes—
your child comes—the years creep with toes of April rain on new-
turned sod

O prairie girl, whoever leaves you only crimson poppies to talk with,
whoever puts a good-by kiss on your lips and never comes back—
There is a song deep as the falltime redhaws, long as the layer of black
loam we go to, the shine of the morning star over the corn belt,
the wave line of dawn up a wheat valley

O prairie mother, I am one of your boys
I have loved the prairie as a man with a heart shot full of pain over love
Here I know I will hanker after nothing so much as one more sunrise
or a sky moon of fire doubled to a river moon of water

. . .

I speak of new cities and new people
I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes
I tell you yesterday is a wind gone down,
a sun dropped in the west
I tell you there is nothing in the world
only an ocean of tomorrows,
a sky of tomorrows

I am a brother of the cornhuskers who say
at sundown
Tomorrow is a day

RIVER ROADS

LET the crows go by hawking their caw and caw
They have been swimming in midnights of coal mines somewhere
Let 'em hawk their caw and caw

Let the woodpecker drum and drum on a hickory stump
He has been swimming in red and blue pools somewhere hundreds of
years
And the blue has gone to his wings and the red has gone to his head
Let his red head drum and drum

Let the dark pools hold the birds in a looking-glass
And if the pool wishes, let it shiver to the blur of many wings, old swimmers from old places

Let the redwing streak a line of vermilion on the green wood lines
And the mist along the river fix its purple in lines of a woman's shawl on lazy shoulders

PRAIRIE WATERS BY NIGHT

CHATTER of birds two by two raises a night song joining a litany of running water—sheer waters showing the russet of old stones remembering many rains

And the long willows drowse on the shoulders of the running water, and sleep from much music, joined songs of day-end, feathery throats and stony waters, in a choir chanting new psalms

It is too much for the long willows when low laughter of a red moon comes down, and the willows drowse and sleep on the shoulders of the running water

EARLY MOON

THE baby moon, a canoe, a silver papoose canoe, sails and sails in the Indian west.

A ring of silver foxes, a must of silver foxes, sit and sit around the Indian moon

One yellow star for a runner, and rows of blue stars for more runners, keep a line of watchers

O foxes, baby moon, runners, you are the panel of memory, fire-white writing tonight of the Red Man's dreams

Who squats, legs crossed and arms folded, matching its look against the moon-face, the star-faces, of the West?

Who are the Mississippi Valley ghosts, of copper foreheads, riding wiry ponies in the night?—no bridles, love-arms on the pony necks, riding in the night a long old trail?

Why do they always come back when the silver foxes sit around the early moon, a silver papoose, in the Indian west?

LAUGHING CORN

THERE was a high majestic fooling
Day before yesterday in the yellow corn.

And day after tomorrow in the yellow corn
There will be high majestic fooling

The ears ripen in late summer
And come on with a conquering laughter,
Come on with a high and conquering laughter

The long-tailed blackbirds are hoarse
One of the smaller blackbirds chitters on a stalk
And a spot of red is on its shoulder
And I never heard its name in my life

Some of the ears are bursting
A white juice works inside
Cornsilk creeps in the end and dangles in the wind
Always—I never knew it any other way—
The wind and the corn talk things over together
And the rain and the corn and the sun and the corn
Talk things over together

Over the road is the farmhouse
The siding is white and a green blind is slung loose
It will not be fixed till the corn is husked
The farmer and his wife talk things over together

AUTUMN MOVEMENT

I CRIED over beautiful things knowing no beautiful thing lasts

The field of cornflower yellow is a scarf at the neck of the copper sun-
burned woman, the mother of the year, the taker of seeds

The northwest wind comes and the yellow is torn full of holes, new beautiful things come in the first spit of snow on the northwest wind, and the old things go, not one lasts

FALLTIME

GOLD of a ripe oat straw, gold of a southwest moon,
Canada thistle blue and flimmering larkspur blue,
Tomatoes shining in the October sun with red hearts,
Shining five and six in a row on a wooden fence,
Why do you keep wishes on your faces all day long,
Wishes like women with half-forgotten lovers going to new cities?
What is there for you in the birds, the birds, the birds, crying down on the
north wind in September, acres of birds spotting the air going south?
Is there something finished? And some new beginning on the way?

ILLINOIS FARMER

BURY this old Illinois farmer with respect
He slept the Illinois nights of his life after days of work in Illinois corn-
fields
Now he goes on a long sleep.
The wind he listened to in the cornsilk and the tassels, the wind that
combed his red beard zero mornings when the snow lay white on the
yellow ears in the bushel basket at the corncrib,
The same wind will now blow over the place here where his hands must
dream of Illinois corn

HITS AND RUNS

I REMEMBER the Chillicothe ball players grappling the Rock Island ball
players in a sixteen-inning game ended by darkness
And the shoulders of the Chillicothe players were a red smoke against the
sundown and the shoulders of the Rock Island players were a yellow
smoke against the sundown.
And the umpire's voice was hoarse calling balls and strikes and outs and
the umpire's throat fought in the dust for a song

VILLAGE IN LATE SUMMER

Lips half-willing in a doorway
Lips half-singing at a window
Eyes half-dreaming in the walls
Feet half-dancing in a kitchen
Even the clocks half-yawn the hours
And the farmers make half-answers

BLIZZARD NOTES

I DON'T blame the kettle drums—they are hungry
And the snare drums—I know what they want—they are empty too
And the harring booming bass drums—they are hungriest of all

The howling spears of the Northwest die down
The lullabies of the Southwest get a chance, a mother song
A cradle moon rides out of a torn hole in the ragbag top of the sky

SUNSET FROM OMAHA HOTEL WINDOW

Into the blue river hills
The red sun runners go
And the long sand changes
And today is a goner
And today is not worth haggling over

Here in Omaha
The gloaming is bitter
As in Chicago
Or Kenosha

The long sand changes
Today is a goner
Time knocks in another brass nail
Another yellow plunger shoots the dark

Constellations
 Wheeling over Omaha
 As in Chicago
 Or Kenosha

The long sand is gone
 and all the talk is stars
 They circle in a dome over Nebraska

STILL LIFE

Cool your heels on the rail of an observation car
 Let the engineer open her up for ninety miles an hour
 Take in the prairie right and left, rolling land and new hay crops, swaths
 of new hay laid in the sun
 A gray village flecks by and the horses hitched in front of the post office
 never blink an eye
 A barnyard and fifteen Holstein cows, dabs of white on a black wall map,
 never blink an eye
 A signalman in a tower, the outpost of Kansas City, keeps his place at a
 window with the serenity of a bronze statue on a dark night when
 lovers pass whispering

BAND CONCERT

BAND concert public square Nebraska city Flowing and circling dresses,
 summer-white dresses Faces, flesh tints flung like sprays of cherry
 blossoms And gigglers, God knows, gigglers, rivaling the pony whin-
 nies of the Livery Stable Blues

Cowboy rags and nigger rags And boys driving sorrel horses hurl a corn-
 field laughter at the girls in dresses, summer-white dresses Amid the
 cornet staccato and the tuba oompa, gigglers, God knows, gigglers
 daffy with life's razzle dazzle.

Slow good-night melodies and Home Sweet Home And the snare drum-
 mer bookkeeper in a hardware store nods hello to the daughter of a

railroad conductor—a giggler, God knows, a giggler—and the summer-white dresses filter fanwise out of the public square

The crushed strawbernes of ice cream soda places, the night wind in cottonwoods and willows, the lattice shadows of doorsteps and porches, these know more of the story

THREE PIECES ON THE SMOKE OF AUTUMN

SMOKE of autumn is on it all
The streamers loosen and travel
The red west is stopped with a gray haze
They fill the ash trees, they wrap the oaks,
They make a long-tailed rider
In the pocket of the first, the earliest evening star

Three muskrats swim west on the Desplaines River

There is a sheet of red ember glow on the river, it is dusk, and the muskrats one by one go on patrol routes west

Around each slippery padding rat, a fan of ripples, in the silence of dusk a faint wash of ripples, the padding of the rats going west, in a dark and shivering river gold

(A newspaper in my pocket says the Germans pierce the Italian line, I have letters from poets and sculptors in Greenwich Village, I have letters from an ambulance man in France and an I W W man in Vladivostok)

I lean on an ash and watch the lights fall, the red ember glow, and three muskrats swim west in a fan of ripples on a sheet of river gold

Better the blue silence and the gray west,
The autumn mist on the river,
And not any hate and not any love,
And not anything at all of the keen and the deep

Only the peace of a dog head on a barn floor,
And the new corn shoveled in bushels
And the pumpkins brought from the corn rows,
Umber lights of the dark,
Umber lanterns of the loam dark

Here a dog head dreams
Not any hate, not any love
Not anything but dreams
Brother of dusk and umber

LOCALITIES

WAGON WHEEL GAP is a place I never saw
And Red Horse Gulch and the chutes of Cripple Creek

Red-shirted miners picking in the sluices,
Gamblers with red neckties in the night streets,
The fly-by-night towns of Bull Frog and Skiddoo,
The night-cool limestone white of Death Valley,
The straight drop of eight hundred feet
From a shelf road in the Hasiampa Valley
Men and places they are I never saw

I have seen three White Horse taverns,
One in Illinois, one in Pennsylvania,
One in a timber-hid road of Wisconsin

I bought cheese and crackers
Between sun showers in a place called White Pigeon
Nestling with a blacksmith shop, a post office,
And a berry-crate factory, where four roads cross

On the Pecatonica River near Freeport
I have seen boys run barefoot in the leaves
Throwing clubs at the walnut trees
In the yellow-and-gold of autumn,
And there was a brown mash dry on the inside of their hands

On the Cedar Fork Creek of Knox County
I know how the fingers of late October
Loosen the hazel nuts
I know the brown eyes of half-open hulls
I knows boys named Lindquist, Swanson, Hildebrand
I remember their cries when the nuts were ripe
And some are in machine shops, some are in the navy,
And some are not on payrolls anywhere
Their mothers are through waiting for them to come home

CABOOSE THOUGHTS

It's going to come out all right—do you know?
The sun, the birds, the grass—they know
They get along—and we'll get along

Some days will be rainy and you will sit waiting
And the letter you wait for won't come,
And I will sit watching the sky tear off gray and gray
And the letter I wait for won't come

There will be ac-ci-dents
I know ac-ci-dents are coming
Smash-ups, signals wrong, washouts, trestles rotten,
Red and yellow ac-ci-dents
But somehow and somewhere the end of the run
The train gets put together again
And the caboose and the green tail lights
Fade down the right of way like a new white hope

I never heard a mockingbird in Kentucky
Spilling its heart in the morning.

I never saw the snow on Chimborazo
It's a high white Mexican hat, I hear

I never had supper with Abe Lincoln.
Nor a dish of soup with Jim Hill

But I've been around
I know some of the boys here who can go a little
I know girls good for a burst of speed any time

I heard Williams and Walker
Before Walker died in the bughouse

I knew a mandolin player
Working in a barber shop in an Indiana town,
And he thought he had a million dollars

I knew a hotel girl in Des Moines
She had eyes, I saw her and said to myself
The sun rises and the sun sets in her eyes
I was her steady and her heart went pit-a-pat
We took away the money for a prize waltz at a Brotherhood dance
She had eyes, she was safe as the bridge over the Mississippi at Burlington,
I married her

Last summer we took the cushions going west
Pike's Peak is a big old stone, believe me
It's fastened down, something you can count on

It's going to come out all right—do you know?
The sun, the birds, the grass—they know.
They get along—and we'll get along

ALIX

THE mare Alix breaks the world's trotting record one day I see her heels
flash down the dust of an Illinois race track on a summer afternoon
I see the timekeepers put their heads together over stop-watches, and
call to the grand stand a split second is clipped off the old world's
record and a new world's record fixed

I see the mare Alix led away by men in undershirts and streaked faces
Dripping Alix in foam of white on the harness and shafts And the
men in undershirts kiss her ears and rub her nose, and tie blankets on
her, and take her away to have the sweat sponged

I see the grand stand jammed with prairie people yelling themselves hoarse
 Almost the grand stand and the crowd of thousands are one pair of
 legs and one voice standing up and yelling hurrah

I see the driver of Alix and the owner smothered in a fury of handshakes,
 a mob of caresses I see the wives of the driver and owner smothered
 in a crush of white summer dresses and parasols

Hours later, at sundown, gray dew creeping on the sod and sheds, I see
 Alix again

*Dark, shining-velvet Alix,
 Night-sky Alix in a gray blanket,
 Led back and forth by a nigger
 Velvet and night-eyed Alix
 With slim legs of steel*

And I want to rub my nose against the nose of the mare Alix

POTATO BLOSSOM SONGS AND JIGS

Rum tiddy um,
 tiddy um,
 tiddy um tum tum

My knees are loose-like, my feet want to sling their selves
 I feel like tickling you under the chin—honey—and a-asking Why Does a
 Chicken Cross the Road?

When the hens are a-laying eggs, and the roosters pluck-pluck-put-akut
 and you—honey—put new potatoes and gravy on the table, and there
 ain't too much rain or too little

Say, why do I feel so gabby?
 Why do I want to holler all over the place?

Do you remember I held empty hands to you
 and I said all is yours
 the handfuls of nothing?

I ask you for white blossoms
 I bring a concertina after sunset under the apple trees
 I bring out "The Spanish Cavalier" and "In the Gloaming, O My Darling."

The orchard here is near and home-like
The oats in the valley run a mile
Between are the green and marching potato vines
The lightning bugs go criss-cross carrying a zigzag of fire the potato bugs
are asleep under their stiff and yellow-striped wings here romance
stutters to the western stars, "Excuse me "

Old foundations of rotten wood
An old barn done-for and out of the wormholes ten-legged roaches shook
up and scared by sunlight
So a pickax digs a long tooth with a short memory
Fire can not eat this rubbish till it has lain in the sun

The story lags
The story has no connections
The story is nothing but a lot of banjo plinka planka plunks

The roan horse is young and will learn the roan horse buckles into harness
and feels the foam on the collar at the end of a haul the roan horse
points four legs to the sky and rolls in the red clover the roan horse
has a rusty jag of hair between the ears hanging to a white star be-
tween the eyes

In Burlington long ago
And later again in Ashtabula
I said to myself
I wonder how far Ophelia went with Hamlet
What else was there Shakespeare never told?
There must have been something
If I go bugs I want to do it like Ophelia
There was class to the way she went out of her head

Does a famous poet eat watermelon?
Excuse me, ask me something easy
I have seen farmhands with their faces in fried catfish on a Monday morn-
ing

And the Japanese, two-legged like us,
The Japanese bring slices of watermelon into pictures
The black seeds make oval polka dots on the pink meat

Why do I always think of niggers and buck-and-wing dancing whenever
I see watermelon?

Summer mornings on the docks I walk among bushel peach baskets piled
ten feet high
Summer mornings I smell new wood and the river wind along with
peaches
I listen to the steamboat whistle hong-honging, hong-honging across the
town
And once I saw a teameo straddling a street with a hay-rack load of melons

Niggers play banjos because they want to
The explanation is easy

It is the same as why people pay fifty cents for tickets to a policemen's
masquerade ball or a grocers-and-butchers' picnic with a fat man's
foot race

It is the same as why boys buy a nickel's worth of peanuts and eat them
and then buy another nickel's worth

Newsboys shooting craps in a back alley have a fugitive understanding of
the scientific principle involved

The jockey in a yellow satin shirt and scarlet boots, riding a sorrel pony at
the county fair, has a grasp of the theory.

It is the same as why boys go running lickety-split
away from a school-room geography lesson
in April when the crawfishes come out
and the young frogs are calling
and the pussywillows and the cat-tails
know something about geography themselves

I ask you for white blossoms
I offer you memories and people
I offer you a fire zigzag over the green and marching vines
I bring a concertina after supper under the home-like apple trees.

I make up songs about things to look at
 potato blossoms in summer night mist filling the garden with white
 spots,
 a cavalryman's yellow silk handkerchief stuck in a flannel pocket over
 the left side of the shirt, over the ventricles of blood, over the
 pumps of the heart

Bring a concertina after sunset under the apple trees
Let romance stutter to the western stars, "Excuse me "

LOAM

In the loam we sleep,
In the cool moist loam,
To the lull of years that pass
And the break of stars,

From the loam, then,
The soft warm loam,
 We rise
To shape of rose leaf,
Of face and shoulder

We stand, then,
To a whiff of life,
Lifted to the silver of the sun
Over and out of the loam
 A day

MANITOBA CHILDE ROLAND

Last night a January wind was ripping at the shingles over our house and
 whistling a wolf song under the eaves

I sat in a leather rocker and read to a six-year-old girl the Browning poem,
 Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came

And her eyes had the haze of autumn hills and it was beautiful to her
and she could not understand

A man is crossing a big prairie, says the poem, and nothing happens—and
he goes on and on—and it's all lonesome and empty and nobody
home

And he goes on and on—and nothing happens—and he comes on a
horse's skull, dry bones of a dead horse—and you know more than
ever it's all lonesome and empty and nobody home

And the man raises a horn to his lips and blows—he fixes a proud neck
and forehead toward the empty sky and the empty land—and blows
one last wonder-cry

And as the shuttling automatic memory of man clicks off its results
willy-nilly and inevitable as the snick of a mouse-trap or the trajectory
of a 42-centimeter projectile,

I flash to the form of a man to his hips in snow drifts of Manitoba and
Minnesota—in the sled derby run from Winnipeg to Minneapolis

He is beaten in the race the first day out of Winnipeg—the lead dog is
eaten by four team mates—and the man goes on and on—running
while the other racers ride—running while the other racers sleep—

Lost in a blizzard twenty-four hours, repeating a circle of travel hour after
hour—fighting the dogs who dig holes in the snow and whimper for
sleep—pushing on—running and walking five hundred miles to the
end of the race—almost a winner—one toe frozen, feet blistered
and frost-bitten.

And I know why a thousand young men of the Northwest meet him in
the finishing miles and yell cheers—I know why judges of the race
call him a winner and give him a special prize even though he is
a loser

I know he kept under his shirt and around his thudding heart amid the
blizzards of five hundred miles that one last wonder-cry of Childe
Roland—and I told the six-year-old girl all about it

And while the January wind was ripping at the shingles and whistling
a wolf song under the eaves, her eyes had the haze of autumn hills
and it was beautiful to her and she could not understand

WILDERNESS

THERE is a wolf in me fangs pointed for tearing gashes a red
tongue for raw meat and the hot lapping of blood—I keep this
wolf because the wilderness gave it to me and the wilderness will
not let it go

There is a fox in me a silver-gray fox I sniff and guess I
pick things out of the wind and air I nose in the dark night and
take sleepers and eat them and hide the feathers I circle and
loop and double-cross

There is a hog in me a snout and a belly a machinery for
eating and grunting a machinery for sleeping satisfied in the
sun—I got this too from the wilderness and the wilderness will not
let it go

There is a fish in me . . . I know I came from salt-blue water-gates
I scurned with shoals of herring I blew waterspouts with por-
poises . . . before land was before the water went down
before Noah . . . before the first chapter of Genesis

There is a baboon in me clambering-clawed dog-faced
yawping a galoot's hunger hairy under the armpits here
are the hawk-eyed hankering men here are the blonde and blue-
eyed women here they hide curled asleep waiting ready to
snarl and kill ready to sing and give milk waiting—I keep
the baboon because the wilderness says so

There is an eagle in me and a mockingbird and the eagle flies among
the Rocky Mountains of my dreams and fights among the Sierra
craggs of what I want and the mockingbird warbles in the early
forenoon before the dew is gone, warbles in the underbrush of my
Chattanooga of hope, gushes over the blue Ozark foothills of my
wishes—And I got the eagle and the mockingbird from the wilderness.

O, I got a zoo, I got a menagerie, inside my ribs, under my bony head,
under my red-valve heart—and I got something else it is a man-child
heart, a woman-child heart it is a father and mother and lover it
came from God-Knows-Where it is going to God-Knows-Where—For
I am the keeper of the zoo I say yes and no. I sing and kill and work
I am a pal of the world I came from the wilderness

Persons Half Known

CHICAGO POET

I SALUTED a nobody
I saw him in a looking-glass
He smiled—so did I
He crumpled the skin on his forehead,
frowning—so did I
Everything I did he did
I said, "Hello, I know you"
And I was a liar to say so

Ah, this looking-glass man!
Liar, fool, dreamer, play-actor,
Soldier, dusty drinker of dust—
Ah! he will go with me
Down the dark stairway
When nobody else is looking,
When everybody else is gone

He locks his elbow in mine,
I lose all—but not him

FIRE-LOGS

NANCY HANKS dreams by the fire,
Dreams, and the logs sputter,
And the yellow tongues climb
Red lines lick their way in flickers
Oh, sputter, logs
 Oh, dream, Nancy
Time now for a beautiful child
Time now for a tall man to come

REPETITIONS

THEY are crying salt tears
Over the beautiful beloved body
Of Inez Milholland,
Because they are glad she lived,
Because she loved open-armed,
Throwing love for a cheap thing
Belonging to everybody—
Cheap as sunlight,
And morning air

ADELAIDE CRAPSEY

AMONG the bumblebees in red-top hay, a freckled field of brown-eyed
Susans dripping yellow leaves in July,
 I read your heart in a book

And your mouth of blue pansy—I know somewhere I have seen it rain-
shattered

And I have seen a woman with her head flung between her naked knees,
and her head held there listening to the sea, the great naked sea
shouldering a load of salt

And the blue pansy mouth sang to the sea
 Mother of God, I'm so little a thing,
 Let me sing longer,
 Only a little longer

And the sea shouldered its salt in long gray combers hauling new shapes
 on the beach sand

YOUNG BULLFROGS

JIMMY WIMBLETON listened a first week in June
Ditches along prairie roads of Northern Illinois
Filled the arch of night with young bullfrog songs
Infinite mathematical metronomic croaks rose and spoke,
Rose and sang, rose in a choir of puzzles
They made his head ache with riddles of music
They rested his head with beaten cadence
Jimmy Wimbledon listened

MEMOIR OF A PROUD BOY

HE lived on the wings of storm
The ashes are in Chihuahua

Out of Ludlow and coal towns in Colorado
Sprang a vengeance of Slav miners, Italians, Scots, Cornishmen, Yanks
Killings ran under the spoken commands of this boy
With eighty men and rifles on a hogback mountain

They killed swearing to remember
The shot and charred wives and children
In the burnt camp of Ludlow,
And Louis Tikas, the laughing Greek,
Plugged with a bullet, clubbed with a gun butt

As a home war
It held the nation a week

And one or two million men stood together
And swore by the retribution of steel

It was all accidental
He lived flecking lint off coat lapels
Of men he talked with
He kissed the miners' babies
And wrote a Denver paper
Of picket silhouettes on a mountain line

He had no mother but Mother Jones
Crying from a jail window of Trinidad
"All I want is room enough to stand
And shake my fist at the enemies of the human race"

Named by a grand jury as a murderer
He went to Chihuahua, forgot his old Scotch name,
Smoked cheroots with Pancho Villa
And wrote letters of Villa as a rock of the people

How can I tell how Don Magregor went?

Three riders emptied lead into him
He lay on the main street of an inland town.
A boy sat near all day throwing stones
To keep pigs away

The Villa men buried him in a pit
With twenty Carranzistas

There is drama in that point
the boy and the pigs
Griffith would make a movie of it to fetch sobs
Victor Herbert would have the drums whirr
In a weave with a high fiddle-string's single clamor.

"And the muchacho sat there all day throwing stones
To keep the pigs away," wrote Gibbons to the Tribune.

Somewhere in Chihuahua or Colorado
Is a leather bag of poems and short stories

BILBEA

(From tablet writing, Babylonian excavations of 4th millennium B C)

BILBEA, I was in Babylon on Saturday night
I saw nothing of you anywhere
I was at the old place and the other girls were there, but no Bilbea

Have you gone to another house? or city?
Why don't you write?
I was sorry I walked home half-sick

Tell me how it goes
Send me some kind of a letter
And take care of yourself

SOUTHERN PACIFIC

HUNTINGTON sleeps in a house six feet long.
Huntington dreams of railroads he built and owned
Huntington dreams of ten thousand men saying Yes, sir

Blithery sleeps in a house six feet long
Blithery dreams of rails and ties he laid
Blithery dreams of saying to Huntington Yes, sir

Huntington,
Blithery, sleep in houses six feet long

WASHERWOMAN

THE washerwoman is a member of the Salvation Army
And over the tub of suds rubbing underwear clean
She sings that Jesus will wash her sins away
And the red wrongs she has done God and man
Shall be white as driven snow
Rubbing underwear she sings of the Last Great Washday.

PORTRAIT OF A MOTORCAR

It's a lean car a long-legged dog of a car a gray-ghost eagle
car
The feet of it eat the dirt of a road . the wings of it eat the hills
Danny the driver dreams of it when he sees women in red skirts and red
sox in his sleep
It is in Danny's life and runs in the blood of him a lean gray-ghost
car

GIRL IN A CAGE

HERE in a cage the dollars come down
To the click of a tube the dollars tumble.
And out of a mouth the dollars run

I finger the dollars,
Paper and silver,
Thousands a day

Some days it's fun
to finger the dollars
Some days
the dollars keep on
in a sob or a whisper:
A flame of rose in the hair,
A flame of silk at the throat.

BUFFALO BILL

Boy heart of Johnny Jones—aching today?
Aching, and Buffalo Bill in town?
Buffalo Bill and ponies, cowboys, Indians?

Some of us know
All about it, Johnny Jones

Buffalo Bill is a slanting look of the eyes,
A slanting look under a hat on a horse
He sits on a horse and a passing look is fixed
On Johnny Jones, you and me, barelegged,
A slanting, passing, careless look under a hat on a horse

Go clickety-clack, O pony hoofs along the street
Come on and slant your eyes again, O Buffalo Bill
Give us again the ache of our boy hearts
Fill us again with the red love of prairies, dark nights, lonely wagons, and
the crack-crack of rifles sputtering flashes into an ambush

SIXTEEN MONTHS

ON the lips of the child Janet float changing dreams
It is a thin spiral of blue smoke,
A morning campfire at a mountain lake

On the lips of the child Janet,
Wisps of haze on ten miles of corn,
Young light blue calls to young light gold of morning

CHILD MARGARET

THE child Margaret begins to write numbers on a Saturday morning, the
first numbers formed under her wishing child fingers
All the numbers come well-born, shaped in figures assertive for a frieze
in a child's room
Both 1 and 7 are straightforward, military, filled with lunge and
attack, erect in shoulder-straps
The 6 and 9 salute as dancing sisters, elder and younger, and 2
is a trapeze actor swinging to handclaps
All the numbers are well-born, only 3 has a hump on its back and 8
is knock-kneed
The child Margaret kisses all once and gives two kisses to 3 and 8
(Each number is a bran-new rag doll . O in the wishing fingers
millions of rag dolls, millions and millions of new rag dolls!)

SINGING NIGGER

YOUR bony head, Jazbo, O dock walloper,
Those grappling hooks, those wheelbarrow handlers,
The dome and the wings of you, nigger,
The red roof and the door of you,
I know where your songs came from
I know why God listens to your, "Walk All Over God's Heaven"
I heard you shooting craps, "My baby's going to have a new dress"
I heard you in the cinders, "I'm going to live anyhow until I die"
I saw five of you with a can of beer on a summer night and I listened to
 the five of you harmonizing six ways to sing, "Way Down Yonder
 in the Cornfield"
I went away asking where I come from

Leather Leggings

LEATHER LEGGINGS

THEY have taken the ball of earth
 and made it a little thing

They were held to the land and horses,
 they were held to the little seas
They have changed and shaped and welded,
 they have broken the old tools and made
 new ones, they are ranging the white
 scarves of cloudland; they are bumping
 the sunken bells of the Carthaginians
 and Phœnicians

they are handling
the strongest sea
as a thing to be handled

The earth was a call that mocked,
it is belted with wires and meshed with
steel, from Pittsburgh to Vladivostok is
an iron ride on a moving house, from
Jerusalem to Tokyo is a reckoned span,
and they talk at night in the storm and
salt, the wind and the war

They have counted the miles to the Sun
and Canopus, they have weighed a small
blue star that comes in the southeast
corner of the sky on a foretold errand.

We shall search the sea again

We shall search the stars again

There are no bars across the way

There is no end to the plan and the clue,
the hunt and the thirst

The motors are drumming, the leather leggings
and the leather coats wait

Under the sea
and out to the stars
we go

PRAYERS OF STEEL

LAY me on an anvil, O God
Beat me and hammer me into a crowbar
Let me pry loose old walls
Let me lift and loosen old foundations

Lay me on an anvil, O God
Beat me and hammer me into a steel spike
Drive me into the girders that hold a skyscraper together

Take red-hot rivets and fasten me into the central girders
Let me be the great nail holding a skyscraper through blue nights into
white stars

ALWAYS THE MOB

Jesus emptied the devils of one man into forty hogs and the hogs took
the edge of a high rock and dropped off and down into the sea a
mob

The sheep on the hills of Australia, blundering four-footed in the sunset
mist to the dark, they go one way, they hunt one sleep, they find
one pocket of grass for all

Karnak? Pyramids? Sphinx paws tall as a coolie? Tombs kept for kings
and sacred cows? A mob

Young roast pigs and naked dancing girls of Belshazzar, the room where
a thousand sat guzzling when a hand wrote Mene, mcne, tekcl,
upharsin? A mob

The honeycomb of green that won the sun as the Hanging Gardens of
Nineveh, flew to its shape at the hands of a mob that followed the
fingers of Nebuchadnezzar: a mob of one hand and one plan

Stones of a circle of hills at Athens, staircases of a mountain in Peru,
scattered clans of marble dragons in China each a mob on the rim
of a sunrise. hammers and wagons have them now

Locks and gates of Panama? The Union Pacific crossing deserts and tun-
neling mountains? The Woolworth on land and the *Titanic* at sea?
Lighthouses blinking a coast line from Labrador to Key West? Pig-
iron bars piled on a barge whistling in a fog off Sheboygan? A mob
hammers and wagons have them tomorrow

The mob? A typhoon tearing loose an island from thousand-year moor-
ings and bastions, shooting a volcanic ash with a fire tongue that
licks up cities and peoples Layers of worms eating rocks and form-
ing loam and valley floors for potatoes, wheat, watermelons

The mob? A jag of lightning, a geyser, a gravel mass loosening

The mob kills or builds the mob is Attila or Genghis Khan,
the mob is Napoleon, Lincoln.

I am born in the mob—I die in the mob—the same goes for you—I don't
care who you are

I cross the sheets of fire in No Man's Land for you, my brother—I slip a
steel tooth into your throat, you my brother—I die for you and I
kill you—It is a twisted and gnarled thing, a crimson wool

One more arch of stars,
In the night of our mist,
In the night of our tears

JABBERERS

I RISE out of my depths with my language
You rise out of your depths with your language

Two tongues from the depths,
Alike only as a yellow cat and a green parrot are alike,
Fling their staccato tantalizations
Into a wildcat jabber
Over a gossamer web of unanswerables

The second and the third silence,
Even the hundredth silence,
Is better than no silence at all
(Maybe this is a jabber too—are we at it again, you and I?)

I rise out of my depths with my language.
You rise out of your depths with your language

One thing there is much of, the name men call it by is time, into this gulf
our syllabic pronunciamentos empty by the way rockets of fire curve
and are gone on the night sky, into this gulf the jabberings go as the
shower at a scissors grinder's wheel

CARTOON

I AM making a Cartoon of a Woman She is the People She is the Great
Dirty Mother
And Many Children hang on her Apron, crawl at her Feet, snuggle at her
Breasts

INTERIOR

In the cool of the night time
The clocks pick off the points
And the mainsprings loosen
They will need winding
One of these days .
 they will need winding

Rabelais in red boards,
Walt Whitman in green,
Hugo in ten-cent paper covers,
Here they stand on shelves
In the cool of the night time
And there is nothing .
To be said against them . . .
Or for them .
In the cool of the night time
And the clocks

A man in pigeon-gray pajamas
The open window begins at his feet
And goes taller than his head
Eight feet high is the pattern

Moon and mist make an oblong layout
Silver at the man's bare feet.
He swings one foot in a moon silver
And it costs nothing

One more day of bread and work.
One more day . so much rags . . .

The man barefoot in moon silver
Mutters "You" and "You"
To things hidden
In the cool of the night time,
In Rabelais, Whitman, Hugo,
In an oblong of moon mist

Out from the window prairielands
Moon mist whitens a golf ground
Whiter yet is a limestone quarry
The crickets keep on chirring

Switch engines of the Great Western
Sidetrack box cars, make up trains
For Weehawken, Oskaloosa, Saskatchewan,
The cattle, the coal, the corn, must go
In the night . . . on the prairielands

Chuff-chuff go the pulses
They beat in the cool of the night time
Chuff-chuff and chuff-chuff
These heartbeats travel the night a mile
And touch the moon silver at the window
And the bones of the man
It costs nothing

Rabelais in red boards,
Whitman in green,
Hugo in ten-cent paper covers,
Here they stand on shelves
In the cool of the night time
And the clocks

STREET WINDOW

THE pawn-shop man knows hunger,
And how far hunger has eaten the heart
Of one who comes with an old keepsake.
Here are wedding rings and baby bracelets,

LEGENDS

CLOWNS DYING

FIVE circus clowns dying this year, morning newspapers told their lives,
how each one horizontal in a last gesture of hands arranged by an
undertaker, shook thousands into convulsions of laughter from behind
rouge-red lips and powder-white face

STEAMBOAT BILL

When the boilers of the Robert E Lee exploded, a steamboat winner of
many races on the Mississippi went to the bottom of the river and
never again saw the wharves of Natchez and New Orleans
And a legend lives on that two gamblers were blown toward the sky and
during their journey laid bets on which of the two would go higher
and which would be first to set foot on the turf of the earth again

FOOT AND MOUTH PLAGUE

When the mysterious foot and mouth epidemic ravaged the cattle of
Illinois, Mrs Hector Smith wept bitterly over the government killing
forty of her soft-eyed Jersey cows, through the newspapers she wept
over her loss for millions of readers in the Great Northwest

SEVENS

The lady who has had seven lawful husbands has written seven years for
a famous newspaper telling how to find love and keep it seven thou-
sand hungry girls in the Mississippi Valley have read the instructions
seven years and found neither illicit loves nor lawful husbands

PROFITEER

I who saw ten strong young men die anonymously, I who saw ten old
mothers hand over their sons to the nation anonymously, I who saw
ten thousand touch the sunlit silver finalities of undistinguished hu-
man glory—why do I sneeze sardonically at a bronze drinking foun-
tain named after one who participated in the war vicariously and
bought ten farms?

PSALM OF THOSE WHO GO FORTH BEFORE DAYLIGHT

THE policeman buys shoes slow and careful, the teamster buys gloves slow and careful, they take care of their feet and hands, they live on their feet and hands

The milkman never argues, he works alone and no one speaks to him, the city is asleep when he is on the job, he puts a bottle on six hundred porches and calls it a day's work, he climbs two hundred wooden stairways, two horses are company for him, he never argues

The rolling-mill men and the sheet-steel men are brothers of cinders, they empty cinders out of their shoes after the day's work, they ask their wives to fix burnt holes in the knees of their trousers, their necks and ears are covered with a smut, they scour their necks and ears, they are brothers of cinders

HORSES AND MEN IN RAIN

LET us sit by a hissing steam radiator a winter's day, gray wind pattering frozen raindrops on the window,
And let us talk about milk wagon drivers and grocery delivery boys

Let us keep our feet in wool slippers and mix hot punches—and talk about mail carriers and messenger boys slipping along the icy sidewalks
Let us write of olden, golden days and hunters of the Holy Grail and men called "knights" riding horses in the rain, in the cold frozen rain for ladies they loved

A roustabout hunched on a coal wagon goes by, icicles drip on his hat rim, sheets of ice wrapping the hunks of coal, the caravansera a gray blur in slant of rain
Let us nudge the steam radiator with our wool slippers and write poems of Launcelot, the hero, and Roland, the hero, and all the olden golden men who rode horses in the rain

QUESTIONNAIRE

HAVE I told any man to be a liar for my sake?
Have I sold ice to the poor in summer and coal to the poor in winter for
the sake of daughters who nursed brindle bull terriers and led with
a leash their dogs clothed in plaid wool jackets?
Have I given any man an earful too much of my talk—or asked any man
to take a snootful of booze on my account?
Have I put wool in my own ears when men tried to tell me what was good
for me? Have I been a bum listener?
Have I taken dollars from the living and the unborn while I made speeches
on the retributions that shadow the heels of the dishonest?
Have I done any good under cover? Or have I always put it in the show
windows and the newspapers?

NEAR KEOKUK

THIRTY-two Greeks are dipping their feet in a creek
Sloshing their bare feet in a cool flow of clear water
All one midsummer day ten hours the Greeks
stand in leather shoes shoveling gravel
Now they hold their toes and ankles
to the drift of running water
Then they go to the bunk cars
and eat mulligan and prune sauce,
Smoke one or two pipefuls, look at the stars,
tell smutty stories
About men and women they have known,
countries they have seen,
Railroads they have built—
and then the deep sleep of children.

LAWYER

WHEN the jury files in to deliver a verdict after weeks of direct and cross examinations, hot clashes of lawyers and cool decisions of the judge, There are points of high silence—twiddling of thumbs is at an end—bailiffs near cuspidors take fresh chews of tobacco and wait—and the clock has a chance for its ticking to be heard

A lawyer for the defense clears his throat and holds himself ready if the word is "Guilty" to enter motion for a new trial, speaking in a soft voice, speaking in a voice slightly colored with bitter wrongs mingled with monumental patience, speaking with mythic Atlas shoulders of many preposterous, unjust circumstances

THREE BALLS

JABOWSKY's place is on a side street and only the rain washes the dusty three balls

When I passed the window a month ago, there rested in proud isolation A family bible with hasps of brass twisted off, a wooden clock with pendulum gone,

And a porcelain crucifix with the glaze nicked where the left elbow of Jesus is represented

I passed today and they were all there, resting in proud isolation, the clock and the crucifix saying no more and no less than before, and a yellow cat sleeping in a patch of sun alongside the family bible with the hasps off

Only the rain washes the dusty three balls in front of Jabowsky's place on a side street

CHICKS

THE chick in the egg picks at the shell, cracks open one oval world, and enters another oval world

"Cheep cheep cheep" is the salutation of the newcomer, the emigrant, the casual at the gates of the new world

"Cheep cheep" from oval to oval, sunset to sunset, star to star

It is at the door of this house, this teeny weeny eggshell exit, it is here
men say a riddle and jeer each other who are you? where do you go
from here?

(In the academies many books, at the circus many sacks of peanuts, at the
club rooms many cigar butts)

"Cheep cheep" from oval to oval, sunset to sunset, star to star

HUMDRUM

If I had a million lives to live
and a million deaths to die
in a million humdrum worlds,
I'd like to change my name
and have a new house number to go by
each and every time I died
and started life all over again

I wouldn't want the same name every time
and the same old house number always,
dying a million deaths,
dying one by one a million times
—would you?

or you?

or you?

JOLIET

On the one hand the steel works
On the other hand the penitentiary.
Santa Fé trains and Alton trains
Between smokestacks on the west
And gray walls on the east
And Lockport down the river

Part of the valley is God's
And part is man's

The river course laid out
A thousand years ago
The canals ten years back

The sun on two canals and one river
Makes three stripes of silver
Or copper and gold
Or shattered sunflower leaves
Talons of an iceberg
Scraped out this valley
Claws of an avalanche loosed here

KNUCKS

In Abraham Lincoln's city,
Where they remember his lawyer's shingle,
The place where they brought him
Wrapped in battle flags,
Wrapped in the smoke of memories
From Tallahassee to the Yukon,
The place now where the shaft of his tomb
Points white against the blue prairie dome,
In Abraham Lincoln's city I saw knucks
In the window of Mister Fischman's second-hand store
On Second Street

I went in and asked, "How much?"
"Thirty cents apiece," answered Mister Fischman
And taking a box of new ones off a shelf
He filled anew the box in the showcase
And said incidentally, most casually
And incidentally
"I sell a carload a month of these "

I slipped my fingers into a set of knucks,
Cast-iron knucks molded in a foundry pattern,
And there came to me a set of thoughts like these
Mister Fischman is for Abe and the "malice to none" stuff,

And the street car strikers and the strike-breakers,
And the sluggers, gunmen, detectives, policemen,
Judges, utility heads, newspapers, priests, lawyers,
They are all for Abe and the "malice to none" stuff

I started for the door
"Maybe you want a lighter pair,"
Came Mister Fischman's voice
I opened the door and the voice again
"You are a funny customer "

Wrapped in battle flags,
Wrapped in the smoke of memories,
This is the place they brought him,
This is Abraham Lincoln's home town

TESTAMENT

I GIVE the undertakers permission to haul my body
to the graveyard and to lay away all, the head, the
feet, the hands, all I know there is something left
over they can not put away

Let the nanny goats and the billy goats of the shanty
people eat the clover over my grave and if any yellow
hair or any blue smoke of flowers is good enough to grow
over me let the dirty-fisted children of the shanty
people pick these flowers

I have had my chance to live with the people who have
too much and the people who have too little and I chose
one of the two and I have told no man why

Haunts

VALLEY SONG

Your eyes and the valley are memories
Your eyes fire and the valley a bowl
It was here a moonrise crept over the timberline
It was here we turned the coffee cups upside down.
And your eyes and the moon swept the valley

I will see you again tomorrow
I will see you again in a million years
I will never know your dark eyes again
These are three ghosts I keep
These are three sumach-red dogs I run with

All of it wraps and knots to a niddle
I have the moon, the timberline, and you.
All three are gone—and I keep all three

IN TALL GRASS

BEES and a honeycomb in the dried head of a horse in a pasture corner—
a skull in the tall grass and a buzz and a buzz of the yellow honey-
hunters

And I ask no better a winding sheet
(over the earth and under the sun)

Let the bees go honey-hunting with yellow blur of wings in the dome of
my head, in the rumbling, singing arch of my skull

Let there be wings and yellow dust and the drone of dreams of honey—
who loses and remembers?—who keeps and forgets?

In a blue sheen of moon over the bones and under the hanging honey-
comb the bees come home and the bees sleep

UPSTAIRS

I too have a garret of old playthings
I have tin soldiers with broken arms upstairs
I have a wagon and the wheels gone upstairs
I have guns and a drum, a jumping-jack and a magic lantern
And dust is on them and I never look at them upstairs
I too have a garret of old playthings

MONOSYLLABIC

LET me be monosyllabic today, O Lord.
Yesterday I loosed a snarl of words on a fool,
on a child
Today, let me be monosyllabic . . . a crony of old men
who wash sunlight in their fingers and
enjoy slow-pacing clocks

FILMS

I HAVE kept all, not one is thrown away, not one given to the ragman, not
one thrust in a corner with a "P-f-f"
The red ones and the blue, the long ones in stripes, and each of the little
black and white checkered ones
Keep them I tell my heart keep them another year, another ten years
they will be wanted again
They came once, they came easy, they came like a first white flurry of
snow in late October,
Like any sudden, presumptuous, beautiful thing, and they were cheap at
the price, cheap like snow

Here a red one and there a long one in yellow stripes,
O there shall be no ragman have these yet a year, yet ten years

KREISLER

SELL me a violin, mister, of old mysterious wood
Sell me a fiddle that has kissed dark nights on the forehead where men
 kiss sisters they love
Sell me dried wood that has ached with passion clutching the knees and
 arms of a storm
Sell me horsehair and rosin that has sucked at the breasts of the morning
 sun for milk
Sell me something crushed in the heartsblood of pain readier than ever
 for one more song

THE SEA HOLD

THE sea is large
The sea hold on a leg of land in the Chesapeake hugs an early sunset and
 a last morning star over the oyster beds and the late clam boats of
 lonely men
Five white houses on a half-mile strip of land five white dice rolled
 from a tube

Not so long ago the sea was large
And today the sea has lost nothing it keeps all

I am a loon about the sea
I make so many sea songs, I cry so many sea cries, I forget so many sea
 songs and sea cries

I am a loon about the sea
So are five men I had a fish fry with once in a tar-paper shack trembling
 in a sand storm
The sea knows more about them than they know themselves
They know only how the sea hugs and will not let go

The sea is large
The sea must know more than any of us

GOLDWING MOTH

A GOLDWING moth is between the scissors and the ink bottle on the desk
 Last night it flew hundreds of circles around a glass bulb and a flame wire
 The wings are a soft gold, it is the gold of illuminated initials in manu-
 scripts of the medieval monks

LOIN CLOTH

BODY of Jesus taken down from the cross
 Carved in ivory by a lover of Christ,
 It is a child's handful you are here,
 The breadth of a man's finger,
 And this ivory loin cloth
 Speaks an interspersal in the day's work,
 The carver's prayer and whim
 And Christ-love

HEMLOCK AND CEDAR

THIN sheets of blue smoke among white slabs near the shingle mill
 winter morning
 Falling of a dry leaf might be heard circular steel tears through a
 log
 Slope of woodland brown soft tinge of blue such as pansy
 eyes
 Farther, field fires funnel of yellow smoke spellings of other
 yellow in corn stubble
 Bobsled on a down-hill road February snow mud . . . horses steam-
 ing Oscar the driver sings ragtime under a spot of red seen a
 mile the red wool yarn of Oscar's stocking cap is seen from the
 shingle mill to the ridge of hemlock and cedar

SUMMER SHIRT SALE

THE summer shirt sale of a downtown haberdasher is glorified in a show-window slang everybody understands the language red dots, yellow circles, blue anchors, and dove-brown hooks, these perform explosions in color stripes and checks fight for the possession of front lines and salients detectives, newsies, teameoes, niggers, all stop, look, and listen the shirt sale and the show window kick at the street with a noise joyous as a clog dancer the ensemble is a challenge to the ghost who walks on paydays

MEDALLION

THE brass medallion profile of your face I keep always
It is not jingling with loose change in my pockets
It is not stuck up in a show place on the office wall
I carry it in a special secret pocket in the day
And it is under my pillow at night
The brass came from a long ways off it was up against hell and high water,
fire and flood, before the face was put on it
It is the side of a head, a woman wishes, a woman waits, a woman swears
behind silent lips that the sea will bring home what is gone

BRICKLAYER LOVE

I THOUGHT of killing myself because I am only a bricklayer and you a
woman who loves the man who runs a drug store

I don't care like I used to, I lay bricks straighter than I used to and I sing
slower handling the trowel afternoons

When the sun is in my eyes and the ladders are shaky and the mortar
boards go wrong, I think of you

ASHURNATSIRPAL III

(From Babylonian tablet, 4,000 years Before Christ)

THREE walls around the town of Tela when I came
They expected everything of those walls,
Nobody in the town came out to kiss my feet

I knocked the walls down, killed three thousand soldiers,
Took away cattle and sheep, took all the loot in sight,
And burned special captives

Some of the soldiers—I cut off hands and feet
Others—I cut off ears and fingers
Some—I put out the eyes
I made a pyramid of heads
I strung heads on trees circling the town.

When I got through with it
There wasn't much left of the town of Tela

MAMMY HUMS

THIS is the song I rested with
The right shoulder of a strong man I leaned on
The face of the rain that drizzled on the short neck of a canal boat
The eyes of a child who slept while death went over and under
The petals of peony pink that fluttered in a shot of wind come and gone

This is the song I rested with
Head, heels, and fingers rocked to the nigger mammy humming of it, to
the mile-off steamboat landing whistle of it

The murmurs run with bees' wings
in a late summer sun
They go and come with white surf
slamming on a beach all day

Get this
And then you may sleep with a late afternoon slumber sun
Then you may slip your head in an elbow knowing nothing—only sleep
If so you sleep in the house of our song,
If so you sleep under the apple trees of our song,
Then the face of sleep must be the one face you were looking for

BRINGERS

Cover me over
In dusk and dust and dreams

Cover me over
And leave me alone

Cover me over,
You tireless, great

Hear me and cover me,
Bringers of dusk and dust and dreams.

CRIMSON RAMBLER

Now that a crimson rambler
begins to crawl over the house
of our two lives—

Now that a red curve
winds across the shingles—

Now that hands
washed in early sunrises
climb and spill scarlet
on a white lattice weave—

Now that a loop of blood
is written on our roof
and reaching around a chimney—

How are the two lives of this house
to keep strong hands and strong hearts?

HAUNTS

THERE are places I go when I am strong
One is a marsh pool where I used to go
 with a long-ear hound-dog
One is a wild crabapple tree, I was there
 a moonlight night with a girl
The dog is gone, the girl is gone, I go to these
 places when there is no other place to go.

HAVE ME

HAVE me in the blue and the sun
Have me on the open sea and the mountains

When I go into the grass of the sea floor, I will go alone
This is where I came from—the chlorine and the salt are blood and bones
It is here the nostrils rush the air to the lungs It is here oxygen clamors
 to be let in
And here in the root grass of the sea floor I will go alone

Love goes far Here love ends
Have me in the blue and the sun.

FIRE DREAMS

(Written to be read aloud, if so be, Thanksgiving Day)

I REMEMBER here by the fire,
In the flickering reds and saffrons,
They came in a ramshackle tub,
Pilgrims in tall hats,
Pilgrims of iron jaws,
Drifting by weeks on beaten seas,
And the random chapters say
They were glad and sang to God

And so
Since the iron-jawed men sat down
And said, "Thanks, O God,"
For life and soup and a little less
Than a hobo handout today,
Since gray winds blew gray patterns of sleet on Plymouth Rock,
Since the iron-jawed men sang "Thanks, O God,"
You and I, O Child of the West,
Remember more than ever
November and the hunter's moon,
November and the yellow-spotted hills

And so
In the name of the iron-jawed men
I will stand up and say yes till the finish is come and gone
God of all broken hearts, empty hands, sleeping soldiers,
God of all star-flung beaches of night sky,
I and my love-child stand up together today and sing "Thanks, O
God"

BABY FACE

WHITE MOON comes in on a baby face
The shafts across her bed are flimmering

Out on the land White Moon shines,
Shines and glimmers against gnarled shadows,
All silver to slow twisted shadows
Falling across the long road that runs from the house

Keep a little of your beauty
And some of your flimmering silver
For her by the window tonight
Where you come in, White Moon

THE YEAR

I

A STORM of white petals,
Buds throwing open baby fists
Into hands of broad flowers

II

Red roses running upward,
Clambering to the clutches of life
Soaked in crimson

III

Rabbles of tattered leaves
Holding golden flimsy hopes
Against the tramlings
Into the pits and gullies

IV

Hoarfrost and silence
Only the muffling
Of winds dark and lonesome—
Great lullabies to the long sleepers

DRUMNOTES *

DAYS of the dead men, Danny
Drum for the dead, drum on your
remembering heart

Jaurès, a great love-heart of France,
a slug of lead in the red valves
Kitchener of Khartoum, tall, cold, proud,
a shark's mouthful
Franz Josef, the old man of forty haunted
kingdoms, in a tomb with the Hapsburg
fathers, moths eating a green uniform
to tatters, worms taking all and leaving
only bones and gold buttons, bones and
iron crosses
Jack London, Jim Riley, Verhaeren, riders to
the republic of dreams

Days of the dead, Danny
Drum on your remembering heart

MOONSET

LEAVES of poplars pick Japanese prints against the west.
Moon sand on the canal doubles the changing pictures
 The moon's good-by ends pictures
The west is empty All else is empty No moon-talk at all now
 Only dark listening to dark

GARDEN WIRELESS

How many feet ran with sunlight, water, and air?

What little devils shaken of laughter, cramming their little ribs with
 chuckles,

Fixed this lone red tulip, a woman's mouth of passion kisses, a nun's
 mouth of sweet thinking, here topping a straight line of green, a pillar
 stem?

Who hurled this bomb of red caresses?—nodding balloon-film shooting its
 wireless every fraction of a second these June days
 Love me before I die,
 Love me—love me now

HANDFULS

BLOSSOMS of babies
Blinking their stories
Come soft
On the dusk and the babble,
Little red gamblers,
Handfuls that slept in the dust

Summers of rain,
Winters of drift,
Tell off the years,

And they go back
Who came soft—
Back to the sod,
To silence and dust,
Gray gamblers,
Handfuls again

COOL TOMBS

WHEN Abraham Lincoln was shoveled into the tombs, he forgot the copperheads and the assassin in the dust, in the cool tombs

And Ulysses Grant lost all thought of con men and Wall Street, cash and collateral turned ashes in the dust, in the cool tombs

Pocahontas' body, lovely as a poplar, sweet as a red haw in November or a pawpaw in May, did she wonder? does she remember? in the dust, in the cool tombs?

Take any streetful of people buying clothes and groceries, cheering a hero or throwing confetti and blowing tin horns tell me if the lovers are losers tell me if any get more than the lovers in the dust in the cool tombs

Shenandoah

SHENANDOAH

IN the Shenandoah Valley, one rider gray and one rider blue, and the sun
on the riders wondering

Piled in the Shenandoah, riders blue and riders gray, piled with shovels,
one and another, dust in the Shenandoah taking them quicker than
mothers take children done with play

The blue nobody remembers, the gray nobody remembers, it's all old and
old nowadays in the Shenandoah

. . .

And all is young, a butter of dandelions slung on the turf, climbing blue
flowers of the wishing woodlands wondering a midnight purple violet
claims the sun among old heads, among old dreams of repeating heads
of a rider blue and a rider gray in the Shenandoah

NEW FEET

EMPTY battlefields keep their phantoms
Grass crawls over old gun wheels
And a nodding Canada thistle flings a purple
Into the summer's southwest wind,
Wrapping a root in the rust of a bayonet,
Reaching a blossom in rust of shrapnel

OLD OSAWATOMIE

JOHN BROWN'S body under the morning stars
Six feet of dust under the morning stars
And a panorama of war performs itself
Over the six-foot stage of circling armies
Room for Gettysburg, Wilderness, Chickamauga,
On a six-foot stage of dust

GRASS

PILE the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo
Shovel them under and let me work—
I am the grass, I cover all

And pile them high at Gettysburg
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun
Shovel them under and let me work
Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the conductor
What place is this?
Where are we now?

I am the grass
Let me work

FLANDERS

FLANDERS, the name of a place, a country of people,
Spells itself with letters, is written in books

"Where is Flanders?" was asked one time,
Flanders known only to those who lived there
And milked cows and made cheese and spoke the home language

"Where is Flanders?" was asked
And the slang adepts shot the reply Search me

A few thousand people milking cows, raising radishes,
On a land of salt grass and dunes, sand-swept with a sea-breath on it
This was Flanders, the unknown, the quiet,
The place where cows hunted lush cuds of green on lowlands,
And the raw-boned plowmen took horses with long shanks
Out in the dawn to the sea-breath

Flanders sat slow-spoken amid slow-swung windmills,
Slow-circling windmill arms turning north or west,
Turning to talk to the swaggering winds, the childish winds,
So Flanders sat with the heart of a kitchen girl
Washing wooden bowls in the winter sun by a window

GARGOYLE

I saw a mouth jeering A smile of melted red iron ran over it Its laugh was
full of nails rattling It was a child's dream of a mouth
A fist hit the mouth knuckles of gun-metal driven by an electric wnst
and shoulder It was a child's dream of an arm
The fist hit the mouth over and over, again and again The mouth bled
melted iron, and laughed its laughter of nails rattling
And I saw the more the fist pounded the more the mouth laughed The
fist is pounding and pounding, and the mouth answering

OLD TIMERS

I AM an ancient reluctant conscript

On the soup wagons of Xerxes I was a cleaner of pans

On the march of Miltiades' phalanx I had a haft and head,
I had a bristling gleaming spear-handle

Red-headed Cæsar picked me for a teamster
He said, "Go to work, you Tuscan bastard,
Rome calls for a man who can drive horses"

The units of conquest led by Charles the Twelfth,
The whirling whimsical Napoleonic columns
They saw me one of the horseshoers

I trimmed the feet of a white horse Bonaparte swept the night stars with

Lincoln said, "Get into the game, your nation takes you"
And I drove a wagon and team and I had my arm shot off
At Spotsylvania Court House

I am an ancient reluctant conscript

HOUSE

Two Swede families live downstairs and an Irish policeman upstairs, and
an old soldier, Uncle Joe

Two Swede boys go upstairs and see Joe His wife is dead, his only son
is dead, and his two daughters in Missouri and Texas don't want him
around

The boys and Uncle Joe crack walnuts with a hammer on the bottom of
a flatiron while the January wind howls and the zero air weaves laces
on the window glass

Joe tells the Swede boys all about Chickamauga and Chattanooga, how
the Union soldiers crept in rain somewhere a dark night and ran for-
ward and killed many Rebels, took flags, held a hill, and won a victory
told about in the histories in school

Joe takes a piece of carpenter's chalk, draws lines on the floor and piles
stove wood to show where six regiments were slaughtered climbing a
slope

"Here they went" and "Here they went," says Joe, and the January wind
howls and the zero air weaves laces on the window glass.

The two Swede boys go downstairs with a big blur of guns, men, and hills
in their heads They eat herring and potatoes and tell the family war
is a wonder and soldiers are a wonder

One breaks out with a cry at supper I wish we had a war now and I could
be a soldier.

JOHN ERICSSON DAY MEMORIAL, 1918

INTO the gulf and the pit of the dark night, the cold night, there is a man
goes into the dark and the cold and when he comes back to his people
he brings fire in his hands and they remember him in the years after-
ward as the fire bringer—they remember or forget—the man whose
head kept singing to the want of his home, the want of his people

For this man there is no name thought of—he has broken from jungles
and the old oxen and the old wagons—circled the earth with ships—
belted the earth with steel—swung with wings and a drumming motor
in the high blue sky—shot his words on a wireless way through shat-
tering sea storms —out from the night and out from the jungles his
head keeps singing—there is no road for him but on and on

Against the sea bastions and the land bastions, against the great air pockets
of stars and atoms, he points a finger, finds a release clutch, touches a
button no man knew before

The soldier with a smoking gun and a gas mask—the workshop man under
the smokestacks and the blueprints—these two are brothers of the
handshake never forgotten—for these two we give the salt tears of
our eyes, the salute of red roses, the flame-won scarlet of poppies

For the soldier who gives all, for the workshop man who gives all, for
these the red bar is on the flag—the red bar is the heart's-blood of the
mother who gave him, the land that gave him

The gray foam and the great wheels of war go by and take all—and the
years give mist and ashes—and our feet stand at these, the memory
places of the known and the unknown, and our hands give a flame-
won poppy—our hands touch the red bar of a flag for the sake of those
who gave—and gave all

REMEMBERED WOMEN

For a woman's face remembered as a spot of quick light on the flat land
of dark night,
For this memory of one mouth and a forehead they go on in the gray
rain and the mud, they go on among the boots and guns
The horizon ahead is a thousand fang flashes, it is a row of teeth that bite
on the flanks of night, the horizon sings of a new kill and a big kill
The horizon behind is a wall of dark etched with a memory, fixed with a
woman's face—they fight on and on, boots in the mud and heads in
the gray rain—for the women they hate and the women they love—
for the women they left behind, they fight on

OUT OF WHITE LIPS

Out of white lips a question Shall seven million dead ask for their blood
a little land for the living wives and children, a little land for the
living brothers and sisters?

Out of white lips —Shall they have only air that sweeps round the earth
for breath of their nostrils and no footing on the dirt of the earth for
their battle-drabbed, battle-soaked shoes?

Out of white lips —Is the red in the flag the blood of a free man on a
piece of land his own or is it the red of a sheep slit in the throat for
mutton?

Out of white lips a white pain murmurs Who shall have land? Him who
has stood ankle deep in the blood of his comrades, in the red trenches
dug in the land?

MEMOIR

PAPA JOFFRE, the shoulders of him wide as the land of France

We look on the shoulders filling the stage of the Chicago Auditorium

A fat mayor has spoken much English and the mud of his speech is crossed
with quicksilver hisses elusive and rapid from floor and gallery

A neat governor speaks English and the listeners ring chimes to his clear
thoughts

Joffre speaks a few words in French, this is a voice of the long firing line
that runs from the salt sea dunes of Flanders to the white spear crags
of the Swiss mountains

This is the man on whose yes and no has hung the death of battalions and
brigades, this man speaks of the tricolor of his country now melted in
a great resolve with the starred bunting of Lincoln and Washington

This is the hero of the Marne, massive, irreckonable, he lets tears roll down
his cheek, they trickle a wet salt off his chin onto the blue coat

There is a play of American hands and voices equal to sea-breakers and a
lift of white sun on a stony beach

A MILLION YOUNG WORKMEN, 1915

A MILLION young workmen straight and strong lay stiff on the grass and
roads,

And the million are now under soil and their rotting flesh will in the
years feed roots of blood-red roses

Yes, this million of young workmen slaughtered one another and never
saw their red hands

And oh, it would have been a great job of killing and a new and beau-
tiful thing under the sun if the million knew why they hacked and
tore each other to death.

The kings are grinning, the kaiser and the czar—they are alive riding in
leather-seated motor cars, and they have their women and roses for
ease, and they eat fresh poached eggs for breakfast, new butter on
toast, sitting in tall water-tight houses reading the news of war

I dreamed a million ghosts of the young workmen rose in their shirts all
soaked in crimson and yelled

God damn the grinning kings, God damn the kaiser and the czar.

[CHICAGO, 1915]

SMOKE

I sit in a chair and read the newspapers

Millions of men go to war, acres of them are buried, guns and ships
broken, cities burned, villages sent up in smoke, and children where
cows are killed off amid hoarse barbecues vanish like finger-rings of
smoke in a north wind

I sit in a chair and read the newspapers

A TALL MAN

THE mouth of this man is a gaunt strong mouth
The head of this man is a gaunt strong head

The jaws of this man are bone of the Rocky Mountains, the Appa-
lachians

The eyes of this man are chlorine of two sobbing oceans,
Foam, salt, green, wind, the changing unknown

The neck of this man is pith of buffalo prairie, old longing and new
beckoning of corn belt or cotton belt,

Either a proud Sequoia trunk of the wilderness

Or huddling lumber of a sawmill waiting to be a roof

Brother mystery to man and mob mystery,

Brother cryptic to lifted cryptic hands,

He is night and abyss, he is white sky of sun, he is the head of the people.

The heart of him the red drops of the people,

The wish of him the steady gray-eagle crag-hunting flights of the people

Humble dust of a wheel-worn road,

Slashed sod under the iron-shining plow,

These of service in him, these and many cities, many borders, many
wrangles between Alaska and the Isthmus, between the Isthmus and
the Horn, and east and west of Omaha, and east and west of Paris,
Berlin, Petrograd

The blood in his right wrist and the blood in his left wrist run with the
right wrist wisdom of the many and the left wrist wisdom of the
many

It is the many he knows, the gaunt strong hunger of the many

THE FOUR BROTHERS

Notes for War Songs (November, 1917)

MAKE war songs out of these,
Make chants that repeat and weave
Make rhythms up to the ragtime chatter of the machine guns,
Make slow-booming psalms up to the boom of the big guns
Make a marching song of swinging arms and swinging legs,
 Going along,
 Going along,

On the roads from San Antonio to Athens, from Seattle to Bagdad—
The boys and men in winding lines of khaki, the circling squares of
 bayonet points

Cowpunchers, cornhuskers, shopmen, ready in khaki,
Ballplayers, lumberjacks, ironworkers, ready in khaki,
A million, ten million, singing, "I am ready"
This the sun looks on between two seaboard,
In the land of Lincoln, in the land of Grant and Lee

I heard one say, "I am ready to be killed"
I heard another say, "I am ready to be killed"
O sunburned clear-eyed boys!
I stand on sidewalks and you go by with drums and guns and bugles,
 You—and the flag!
And my heart tightens, a fist of something feels my throat
 When you go by,
You on the kaiser hunt, you and your faces saying, "I am ready to be
 killed"

They are hunting death,
Death for the one-armed mastoid kaiser
They are after a Hohenzollern head
There is no man-hunt of men remembered like this.

The four big brothers are out to kill
France, Russia, Britain, America—
The four republics are sworn brothers to kill the kaiser

Yes, this is the great man-hunt,
And the sun has never seen till now
Such a line of toothed and tusked man-killers,
In the blue of the upper sky,
In the green of the undersea,
In the red of winter dawns
Eating to kill,
Sleeping to kill,
Asked by their mothers to kill,
Wished by four-fifths of the world to kill—
To cut the kaiser's throat,
To hack the kaiser's head,
To hang the kaiser on a high-horizon gibbet

And is it nothing else than this?
Three times ten million men thirsting the blood
Of a half-cracked one-armed child of the German kings?
Three times ten million men asking the blood
Of a child born with his head wrong-shaped,
The blood of rotted kings in his veins?
If this were all, O God,
I would go to the far timbers
And look on the gray wolves
Tearing the throats of moose
I would ask a wilder drunk of blood

Look! It is four brothers in joined hands together
 The people of bleeding France,
 The people of bleeding Russia,
 The people of Britain, the people of America—
These are the four brothers, these are the four republics
 .

At first I said it in anger as one who clenches his fist in wrath to fling
 his knuckles into the face of some one taunting,
Now I say it calmly as one who has thought it over and over again at
 night, among the mountains, by the sea-combers in storm

I say now, by God, only fighters today will save the world, nothing but
fighters will keep alive the names of those who left red prints of
bleeding feet at Valley Forge in Christmas snow
On the cross of Jesus, the sword of Napoleon, the skull of Shakespeare,
the pen of Tom Jefferson, the ashes of Abraham Lincoln, or any sign
of the red and running life poured out by the mothers of the world,
By the God of morning glories climbing blue the doors of quiet homes,
by the God of tall hollyhocks laughing glad to children in peaceful
valleys, by the God of new mothers wishing peace to sit at windows
nursing babies,
I swear only reckless men, ready to throw away their lives by hunger,
deprivation, desperate clinging to a single purpose imperturbable and
undaunted, men with the primitive guts of rebellion,
Only fighters gaunt with the red brand of labor's sorrow on their brows
and labor's terrible pride in their blood, men with souls asking
danger—only these will save and keep the four big brothers

Good-night is the word, good-night to the kings, to the czars,
Good-night to the kaiser
The breakdown and the fade-away begins
The shadow of a great broom, ready to sweep out the trash, is here

One finger is raised that counts the czar,
The ghost who beckoned men who come no more—
The czar gone to the winds on God's great dustpan,
The czar a pinch of nothing,
The last of the gibbering Romanoffs

Out and good-night—
The ghosts of the summer palaces
And the ghosts of the winter palaces!
Out and out, good-night to the kings, the czars, the kaisers

Another finger will speak,
And the kaiser, the ghost who gestures a hundred million sleeping-
waking ghosts,
The kaiser will go onto God's great dustpan—
The last of the gibbering Hohenzollerns
Look! God pities this trash, God waits with a broom and a dustpan,
God knows a finger will speak and count them out

It is written in the stars,
It is spoken on the walls,
It clicks in the fire-white zigzag of the Atlantic wireless,
It mutters in the bastions of thousand-mile continents,
It sings in a whistle on the midnight winds from Walla Walla to Mesopotamia
Out and good-night

The millions slow in khaki,
The millions learning *Turkey in the Straw* and *John Brown's Body*,
The millions remembering windrows of dead at Gettysburg, Chickamauga, and Spotsylvania Court House,
The millions dreaming of the morning star of Appomattox,
The millions easy and calm with guns and steel, planes and prow
 There is a hammering, drumming hell to come
 The killing gangs are on the way

God takes one year for a job
God takes ten years or a million
God knows when a doom is written
God knows this job will be done and the words spoken
Out and good-night

 The red tubes will run,
 And the great price be paid,
 And the homes empty,
 And the wives wishing,
 And the mothers wishing
There is only one way now, only the way of the red tubes and the great price

Well

Maybe the morning sun is a five-cent yellow balloon,
And the evening stars the joke of a God gone crazy.
Maybe the mothers of the world,
And the life that pours from their torsal folds—
Maybe it's all a lie sworn by liars,
And a God with a cackling laughter says
"I, the Almighty God,
I have made all this,
I have made it for kaisers, czars, and kings."

Three times ten million men say No
Three times ten million men say
 God is a God of the People
And the God who made the world
 And fixed the morning sun,
 And flung the evening stars,
 And shaped the baby hands of life,
This is the God of the Four Brothers,
This is the God of bleeding France and bleeding Russia,
This is the God of the people of Britain and America

The graves from the Irish Sea to the Caucasus peaks are ten times a million
The stubs and stumps of arms and legs, the eyesockets empty, the cripples, ten times a million
The crimson thumb-print of this anathema is on the door panels of a hundred million homes
Cows gone, mothers on sick-beds, children cry a hunger and no milk comes in the noon-time or at night
The death-yells of it all, the torn throats of men in ditches calling for water, the shadows and the hacking lungs in dugouts, the steel paws that clutch and squeeze a scarlet drain day by day—the storm of it is hell
But look! child! the storm is blowing for a clean air

Look! the four brothers march
And hurl their big shoulders
And swear the job shall be done.

Out of the wild finger-writing north and south, east and west, over the blood-crossed, blood-dusty ball of earth,
Out of it all a God who knows is sweeping clean,
Out of it all a God who sees and pierces through, is breaking and cleaning out an old thousand years, is making ready for a new thousand years
The four brothers shall be five and more

Under the chimneys of the winter-time the children of the world shall sing new songs
Among the rocking restless cradles the mothers of the world shall sing new sleepy-time songs

SMOKE AND STEEL

TO

COL EDWARD J STEICHEN

*painter of nocturnes and faces, camera engraver of glints and moments, listener
to blue evening winds and new yellow roses, dreamer and finder,
rider of great mornings in gardens, valleys, battles*

Smoke Nights

SMOKE AND STEEL

SMOKE of the fields in spring is one,
Smoke of the leaves in autumn another
Smoke of a steel-mill roof or a battleship funnel,
They all go up in a line with a smokestack,
Or they twist in the slow twist . of the wind.

If the north wind comes they run to the south
If the west wind comes they run to the east
 By this sign
 all smokes
 know each other
Smoke of the fields in spring and leaves in autumn,
Smoke of the finished steel, chilled and blue,
By the oath of work they swear "I know you"

Hunted and hissed from the center
Deep down long ago when God made us over,
Deep down are the cinders we came from—
You and I and our heads of smoke

. . .

Some of the smokes God dropped on the job
Cross on the sky and count our years
And sing in the secrets of our numbers,
Sing their dawns and sing their evenings,
Sing an old log-fire song
 You may put the damper up,
 You may put the damper down,
 The smoke goes up the chimney just the same

Smoke of a city sunset skyline,
Smoke of a country dusk horizon—
 They cross on the sky and count our years

Smoke of a brick-red dust
 Winds on a spiral
 Out of the stacks
For a hidden and glimpsing moon
This, said the bar-iron shed to the blooming mill,
This is the slang of coal and steel
The day-gang hands it to the night-gang,
The night-gang hands it back

Stammer at the slang of this—
Let us understand half of it
 In the rolling mills and sheet mills,
 In the harr and boom of the blast fires,
 The smoke changes its shadow
 And men change their shadow,
 A nigger, a wop, a bohunk changes

 A bar of steel—it is only
Smoke at the heart of it, smoke and the blood of a man
A runner of fire ran in it, ran out, ran somewhere else,
And left—smoke and the blood of a man
And the finished steel, chilled and blue
So fire runs in, runs out, runs somewhere else again,
And the bar of steel is a gun, a wheel, a nail, a shovel,
A rudder under the sea, a steering-gear in the sky,
And always dark in the heart and through it,
 Smoke and the blood of a man
Pittsburgh, Youngstown, Gary—they make their steel with men

In the blood of men and the ink of chimneys
The smoke nights write their oaths
Smoke into steel and blood into steel,
Homestead, Braddock, Birmingham, they make their steel with men
Smoke and blood is the mix of steel

The birdmen drone
in the blue, it is steel
a motor sings and zooms

Steel barbwire around The Works
Steel guns in the holsters of the guards at the gates of The Works
Steel ore-boats bring the loads clawed from the earth by steel, lifted and
lugged by arms of steel, sung on its way by the clanking clam shells
The runners now, the handlers now, are steel, they dig and clutch and
haul, they hoist their automatic knuckles from job to job, they are
steel making steel
Fire and dust and air fight in the furnaces, the pour is timed, the billets
wriggle, the clinkers are dumped
Liners on the sea, skyscrapers on the land, diving steel in the sea, climb-
ing steel in the sky.

. . . .

Finders in the dark, you Steve with a dinner bucket, you Steve clumping
in the dusk on the sidewalks with an evening paper for the woman
and kids, you Steve with your head wondering where we all end up—
Finders in the dark, Steve I hook my arm in cinder sleeves, we go down
the street together, it is all the same to us, you Steve and the rest
of us end on the same stars, we all wear a hat in hell together, in
hell or heaven

Smoke nights now, Steve
Smoke, smoke, lost in the sieves of yesterday;
Dumped again to the scoops and hooks today
Smoke like the clocks and whistles, always
Smoke nights now
Tomorrow something else

Luck moons come and go
Five men swim in a pot of red steel
Their bones are kneaded into the bread of steel
Their bones are knocked into coils and anvils
And the sucking plungers of sea-fighting turbines.
Look for them in the woven frame of a wireless station.
So ghosts hide in steel like heavy-armed men in mirrors

Peepers, skulkers—they shadow-dance in laughing tombs
They are always there and they never answer

One of them said "I like my job, the company is good to me, America
is a wonderful country"

One "Jesus, my bones ache, the company is a liar, this is a free country,
like hell"

One "I got a girl, a peach, we save up and go on a farm and raise pigs
and be the boss ourselves"

And the others were roughneck singers a long ways from home
Look for them back of a steel vault door

They laugh at the cost
They lift the birdmen into the blue
It is steel a motor sings and zooms

In the subway plugs and drums,
In the slow hydraulic drills, in gumbo or gravel,
Under dynamo shafts in the webs of armature spiders
They shadow-dance and laugh at the cost

The ovens light a red dome
Spools of fire wind and wind
Quadrangles of crimson sputter
The lashes of dying maroon let down.
Fire and wind wash out the slag
Forever the slag gets washed in fire and wind
The anthem learned by the steel is

Do this or go hungry
Look for our rust on a plow
Listen to us in a threshing-engine razz
Look at our job in the running wagon wheat

Fire and wind wash at the slag.
Box-cars, clocks, steam-shovels, churns, pistons, boilers, scissors—
Oh, the sleeping slag from the mountains, the slag-heavy pig-iron will go
down many roads
Men will stab and shoot with it, and make butter and tunnel rivers, and
mow hay in swaths, and slit hogs and skin beeves, and steer air-
planes across North America, Europe, Asia, round the world.

Hacked from a hard rock country, broken and baked in mills and smelters,
the rusty dust waits
Till the clean hard weave of its atoms cripples and blunts the drills chewing
a hole in it
The steel of its plinths and flanges is reckoned, O God, in one-millionth
of an inch

Once when I saw the curves of fire, the rough scarf women dancing,
Dancing out of the flues and smokestacks—flying hair of fire, flying feet
upside down,
Buckets and baskets of fire exploding and chortling, fire running wild out
of the steady and fastened ovens,
Sparks cracking a harr-harr-huff from a solar-plexus of rock-ribs of the
earth taking a laugh for themselves,
Ears and noses of fire, gibbering gorilla arms of fire, gold mud-pies, gold
bird-wings, red jackets riding purple mules, scarlet autocrats tumbling
from the humps of camels, assassinated czars straddling vermilion
balloons,
I saw then the fires flash one by one good-by then smoke, smoke,
And in the screens the great sisters of night and cool stars, sitting women
arranging their hair,
Waiting in the sky, waiting with slow easy eyes, waiting and half-
murmuring
 "Since you know all
 and I know nothing,
 tell me what I dreamed last night "

. . .

Pearl cobwebs in the windy rain,
in only a flicker of wind,
are caught and lost and never known again

A pool of moonshine comes and waits,
but never waits long the wind picks up
loose gold like this and is gone

A bar of steel sleeps and looks slant-eyed
on the pearl cobwebs, the pools of moonshine,
sleeps slant-eyed a million years,
sleeps with a coat of rust, a vest of moths,
a shirt of gathering sod and loam

The wind never bothers a bar of steel
The wind picks only pearl cobwebs pools of moonshine

FIVE TOWNS ON THE B AND O

By day tireless smokestacks hungry smoky shanties hanging to
the slopes crooning
We get by, that's all
By night all lit up fire-gold bars, fire-gold flues and the
shanties shaking in clumsy shadows almost the hills shaking
all crooning By God, we're going to find out or know why

WORK GANGS

Box cars run by a mile long
And I wonder what they say to each other
When they stop a mile long on a sidetrack
Maybe their chatter goes
I came from Fargo with a load of wheat up to the danger line
I came from Omaha with a load of shorthorns and they splintered my
boards
I came from Detroit heavy with a load of flivvers
I carried apples from the Hood River last year and this year bunches of
bananas from Florida, they look for me with watermelons from Mis-
sissippi next year

Hammers and shovels of work gangs sleep in shop corners
when the dark stars come on the sky and the night watchmen walk and
look

Then the hammer heads talk to the handles,
then the scoops of the shovels talk,
how the day's work nicked and trimmed them,
how they swung and lifted all day,
how the hands of the work gangs smelled of hope
In the night of the dark stars
when the curve of the sky is a work gang handle,
in the night on the mile long sidetracks,

in the night where the hammers and shovels sleep in corners,
the night watchmen stuff their pipes with dreams—
and sometimes they doze and don't care for nothin',
and sometimes they search their heads for meanings, stories, stars

The stuff of it runs like this

A long way we come, a long way to go, long rests and long deep sniffs for
our lungs on the way

Sleep is a belonging of all, even if all songs are old songs and the singing
heart is snuffed out like a switchman's lantern with the oil gone,
even if we forget our names and houses in the finish, the secret of
sleep is left us, sleep belongs to all, sleep is the first and last and
best of all

People singing, people with song mouths connecting with song hearts,
people who must sing or die, people whose song hearts break if there
is no song mouth, these are my people

PENNSYLVANIA

I HAVE been in Pennsylvania,
In the Monongahela and the Hocking Valleys

In the blue Susquehanna
On a Saturday morning
I saw the mounted constabulary go by,
I saw boys playing marbles
Spring and the hills laughed

And in places
Along the Appalachian chain,
I saw steel arms handling coal and iron,
And I saw the white-cauliflower faces
Of miners' wives waiting for the men to come home from the day's work

I made color studies in crimson and violet
Over the dust and domes of culm at sunset

WHIRLS

NEITHER rose leaves gathered in a jar—respectably in Boston—these—nor
drops of Christ blood for a chalice—decently in Philadelphia or
Baltimore

Cinders—these—hissing in a marl and lime of Chicago—also these—the
howling of northwest winds across North and South Dakota—or the
spatter of winter spray on sea rocks of Kamchatka

People Who Must

PEOPLE WHO MUST

I PAINTED on the roof of a skyscraper
I painted a long while and called it a day's work
The people on a corner swarmed and the traffic cop's whistle never let
up all afternoon
They were the same as bugs, many bugs on their way—
Those people on the go or at a standstill,
And the traffic cop a spot of blue, a splinter of brass,
Where the black tides ran around him
And he kept the street I painted a long while
And called it a day's work.

ALLEY RATS

THEY were calling certain styles of whiskers by the name of "lilacs"
And another manner of beard assumed in their chatter a verbal guise
Of "mutton chops," "galways," "feather dusters"

Metaphors such as these sprang from their lips while other street cries
Sprang from sparrows finding scattered oats among interstices of the curb
Ah-hah these metaphors—and Ah-hah these boys—among the police they
were known
As the Dirty Dozen and their names took the front pages of newspapers
And two of them croaked on the same day at a "necktie party" . if
we employ the metaphors of their lips

ELEVENTH AVENUE RACKET

THERE is something terrible
about a hurdy-gurdy,
a gypsy man and woman,
and a monkey in red flannel
all stopping in front of a big house
with a sign "For Rent" on the door
and the blinds hanging loose
and nobody home
I never saw this
I hope to God I never will

Whoop-de-doodle-de-doo
Hoodle-de-harr-de-hum
Nobody home? Everybody home
Whoop-de-doodle-de-doo
Mamie Riley married Jimmy Higgins last night Eddie Jones died of
whooping cough George Hacks got a job on the police force the
Rosenheims bought a brass bed Lena Hart giggled at a jackie a
pushcart man called tomaytoes, tomaytoes
Whoop-de-doodle-de-doo
Hoodle-de-harr-de-hum
Nobody home? Everybody home

HOME FIRES

IN a Yiddish eating place on Rivington Street faces coffee
spots children kicking at the night stars with bare toes from
bare buttocks
They know it is September on Rivington when the red tomaytoes cram
the pushcarts,
Here the children snuzzle at milk bottles, children who have never seen
a cow
Here the stranger wonders how so many people remember where they
keep home fires

HATS

HATS, where do you belong?
what is under you?

On the rim of a skyscraper's forehead
I looked down and saw hats fifty thousand hats
Swarming with a noise of bees and sheep, cattle and waterfalls,
Stopping with a silence of sea grass, a silence of prairie corn
Hats tell me your high hopes.

THEY ALL WANT TO PLAY HAMLET

THEY all want to play Hamlet
They have not exactly seen their fathers killed
Nor their mothers in a frame-up to kill,
Nor an Ophelia dying with a dust gagging the heart,
Not exactly the spinning circles of singing golden spiders,
Not exactly this have they got at nor the meaning of flowers—O flowers,
flowers slung by a dancing girl—in the saddest play the inkfish,
Shakespeare, ever wrote,
Yet they all want to play Hamlet because it is sad like all actors are sad
and to stand by an open grave with a joker's skull in the hand and

then to say over slow and say over slow wise, keen, beautiful words
masking a heart that's breaking, breaking,
This is something that calls and calls to their blood
They are acting when they talk about it and they know it is acting to be
particular about it and yet They all want to play Hamlet

THE MAYOR OF GARY

I ASKED the Mayor of Gary about the 12-hour day and the 7-day week
And the Mayor of Gary answered more workmen steal time on the job in
Gary than any other place in the United States
"Go into the plants and you will see men sitting around doing nothing—
machinery does everything," said the Mayor of Gary when I asked
him about the 12-hour day and the 7-day week
And he wore cool cream pants, the Mayor of Gary, and white shoes, and
a barber had fixed him up with a shampoo and a shave and he was
easy and imperturbable though the government weather bureau thermometer said 96 and children were soaking their heads at bubbling
fountains on the street corners
And I said good-by to the Mayor of Gary and I went out from the city
hall and turned the corner into Broadway
And I saw workmen wearing leather shoes scuffed with fire and cinders,
and pitted with little holes from running molten steel,
And some had bunches of specialized muscles around their shoulder blades
hard as pig iron, muscles of their forearms were sheet steel and they
looked to me like men who had been somewhere

[GARY, INDIANA, 1915]

OMAHA

RED barns and red heifers spot the green
grass circles around Omaha—the farmers
haul tanks of cream and wagon loads of
cheese

Shale hogbacks across the river at Council
Bluffs—and shanties hang by an eyelash to
the hill slants back around Omaha

A span of steel ties up the kin of Iowa and
Nebraska across the yellow, big-hoofed Missouri
River

Omaha, the roughneck, feeds armies,
Eats and swears from a dirty face
Omaha works to get the world a breakfast

GALOOTS

GALOOTS, you hairy, hankering,
Snousle on the bones you eat, chew at the gristle and lick the last of it
Grab off the bones in the paws of other galoots—hook your claws in their
sleazy mouths—snap and run
If long-necks sit on their rumps and sing wild cries to the winter moon,
chasing their tails to the flickers of foolish stars let 'em howl
Galoots fat with too much, galoots lean with too little, galoot millions and
millions, snousle and snicker on, plug your exhausts, hunt your snacks
of fat and lean, grab off yours

CRABAPPLE BLOSSOMS

SOMEBODY'S little girl—how easy to make a sob story over who she was once
and who she is now
Somebody's little girl—she played once under a crabapple tree in June and
the blossoms fell on the dark hair

It was somewhere on the Erie line and the town was Salamanca or Painted
Post or Horse's Head
And out of her hair she shook the blossoms and went into the house and
her mother washed her face and her mother had an ache in her heart
at a rebel voice, "I don't want to"

Somebody's little girl—forty little girls of somebodies splashed in red tights
forming horseshoes, arches, pyramids—forty little show girls, ponies,
squabs
How easy a sob story over who she once was and who she is now—and
how the crabapple blossoms fell on her dark hair in June

Let the lights of Broadway spangle and splatter—and the taxis hustle the
crowds away when the show is over and the street goes dark
Let the girls wash off the paint and go for their midnight sandwiches—
let 'em dream in the morning sun, late in the morning, long after the
morning papers and the milk wagons—
Let 'em dream long as they want to of June somewhere on the Erie
line and crabapple blossoms

REAL ESTATE NEWS

ARMOUR AVENUE was the name of this street and door signs on empty houses read "The Silver Dollar," "Swede Annie" and the Christian names of madams such as "Myrtle" and "Jenny"

Scrap iron, rags and bottles fill the front rooms hither and yon and signs in Yiddish say Abe Kaplan & Co are running junk shops in whose houses of former times

The segregated district, the Tenderloin, is here no more, the red-lights are gone, the ring of shovels handling scrap iron replaces the banging of pianos and the bawling songs of pimps.

[CHICAGO, 1915]

MANUAL SYSTEM

MARY has a thingamajig clamped on her ears
And sits all day taking plugs out and sticking plugs in
Flashes and flashes—voices and voices
 calling for ears to pour words in
Faces at the ends of wires asking for other faces
 at the ends of other wires
All day taking plugs out and sticking plugs in,
Mary has a thingamajig clamped on her ears.

STRIPES

POLICEMAN in front of a bank 3 A M lonely
Policeman State and Madison high noon mobs . cars
parcels lonely.

Woman in suburbs keeping night watch on a sleeping typhoid pa-
 tient only a clock to talk to lonesome
 Woman selling gloves bargain day department store furious
 crazy-work of many hands slipping in and out of gloves lone-
 some

HONKY TONK IN CLEVELAND, OHIO

It's a jazz affair, drum crashes and cornet razzes
 The trombone pony neighs and the tuba jackass snorts
 The banjo tickles and titters too awful
 The chippies talk about the funnies in the papers
 The cartoonists weep in their beer
 Ship riveters talk with their feet
 To the feet of floozies under the tables
 A quartet of white hopes mourn with interspersed snickers
 "I got the blues
 I got the blues.
 I got the blues"
 And as we said earlier
 The cartoonists weep in their beer

CRAPSHOOTERS

SOMEBODY loses whenever somebody wins
 This was known to the Chaldeans long ago
 And more somebody wins whenever somebody loses
 This too was in the savvy of the Chaldeans

They take it heaven's hereafter is an eternity of crap games where they
 try their wrists years and years and no police come with a wagon, the
 game goes on forever
 The spots on the dice are the music signs of the songs of heaven here
 God is Luck Luck is God we are all bones the High Thrower rolled
 some are two spots, some double sixes

The myths are Phoebe, Little Joe, Big Dick
Hope runs high with a Huh, seven—huh, come seven
This too was in the savvy of the Chaldeans

SOUP

I SAW a famous man eating soup
I say he was lifting a fat broth
Into his mouth with a spoon
His name was in the newspapers that day
Spelled out in tall black headlines
And thousands of people were talking about him

When I saw him,
He sat bending his head over a plate
Putting soup in his mouth with a spoon

CLINTON SOUTH OF POLK

I WANDER down on Clinton street south of Polk
And listen to the voices of Italian children quarreling
It is a cataract of coloratura
And I could sleep to their musical threats and accusations

BLUE ISLAND INTERSECTION

Six street ends come together here
They feed people and wagons into the center
In and out all day horses with thoughts of nose-bags,
Men with shovels, women with baskets and baby buggies
Six ends of streets and no sleep for them all day
The people and wagons come and go, out and in.
Triangles of banks and drug stores watch
The policemen whistle, the trolley cars bump
Wheels, wheels, feet, feet, all day

In the false dawn when the chickens blink
And the east shakes a lazy baby toe at tomorrow,
And the east fixes a pink half-eye this way,
In the time when only one milk wagon crosses
These three streets, these six street ends,
It is the sleep time and they rest.
The triangle banks and drug stores rest
The policeman is gone, his star and gun sleep
The owl car blutters along in a sleep-walk

RED-HEADED RESTAURANT CASHIER

SHAKE back your hair, O red-headed girl
Let go your laughter and keep your two proud freckles on your chin
Somewhere is a man looking for a red-headed girl and some day maybe
 he will look into your eyes for a restaurant cashier and find a lover,
 maybe
Around and around go ten thousand men hunting a red-headed girl with
 two freckles on her chin
I have seen them hunting, hunting
 Shake back your hair, let go your laughter.

BOY AND FATHER

THE boy Alexander understands his father to be a famous lawyer
The leather law books of Alexander's father fill a room like hay in a barn
Alexander has asked his father to let him build a house like bricklayers
 build, a house with walls and roofs made of big leather law books

The rain beats on the windows
And the raindrops run down the window glass
And the raindrops slide off the green blinds down the siding
The boy Alexander dreams of Napoleon in John C Abbott's history,
 Napoleon the grand and lonely man wronged, Napoleon in his life
 wronged and in his memory wronged
The boy Alexander dreams of the cat Alice saw, the cat fading off into
 the dark and leaving the teeth of its Cheshire smile lighting the
 gloom.

Buffaloes, blizzards, way down in Texas, in the panhandle of Texas snug-
gling close to New Mexico,
These creep into Alexander's dreaming by the window when his father
talks with strange men about land down in Deaf Smith County
Alexander's father tells the strange men Five years ago we ran a Ford out
on the prairie and chased antelopes

Only once or twice in a long while has Alexander heard his father say
"my first wife" so-and-so and such-and-such
A few times softly the father has told Alexander, "Your mother . . . was
a beautiful woman . . . but we won't talk about her"
Always Alexander listens with a keen listen when he hears his father men-
tion "my first wife" or "Alexander's mother"

Alexander's father smokes a cigar and the Episcopal rector smokes a cigar
and the words come often mystery of life, mystery of life
These two come into Alexander's head blurry and gray while the rain
beats on the windows and the raindrops run down the window glass
and the raindrops slide off the green blinds and down the siding
These and There is a God, there must be a God, how can there be rain
or sun unless there is a God?

So from the wrongs of Napoleon and the Cheshire cat smile on to the
buffaloes and blizzards of Texas and on to his mother and to God, so
the blurry gray rain dreams of Alexander have gone on five minutes,
maybe ten, keeping slow easy time to the raindrops on the window
glass and the raindrops sliding off the green blinds and down the
siding

CLEAN CURTAINS

NEW neighbors came to the corner house at Congress and Green streets

The look of their clean white curtains was the same as the rim of a nun's
bonnet.

One way was an oyster pail factory, one way they made candy, one way
paper boxes, strawboard cartons

The warehouse trucks shook the dust of the ways loose and the wheels
whirled dust—there was dust of hoof and wagon wheel and rubber
tire—dust of police and fire wagons—dust of the winds that circled
at midnights and noon listening to no prayers

“O mother, I know the heart of you,” I sang passing the rim of a nun’s
bonnet—O white curtains—and people clean as the prayers of Jesus
here in the faded ramshackle at Congress and Green

Dust and the thundering trucks won—the barrages of the street wheels
and the lawless wind took their way—was it five weeks or six the little
mother, the new neighbors, battled and then took away the white
prayers in the windows?

CRIMSON CHANGES PEOPLE

DID I see a crucifix in your eyes
and nails and Roman soldiers
and a dusk Golgotha?

DID I see Mary, the changed woman,
washing the feet of all men,
clean as new grass
when the old grass burns?

DID I see moths in your eyes, lost moths,
with a flutter of wings that meant
we can never come again

DID I see No Man’s Land in your eyes
and men with lost faces, lost loves,
and you among the stubs crying?

DID I see you in the red death jazz of war
losing moths among lost faces,
speaking to the stubs who asked you
to speak of songs and God and dancing,
of bananas, northern lights or Jesus,
any hummingbird of thought whatever
flying away from the red death jazz of war?

Did I see your hand make a useless gesture
trying to say with a code of five fingers
something the tongue only stutters?
did I see a dusk Golgotha?

NEIGHBORS

ON Forty-first Street
near Eighth Avenue
a frame house wobbles

If houses went on crutches
this house would be
one of the cripples

A sign on the house
Church of the Living God
And Rescue Home for Orphan Children

From a Greek coffee house
Across the street
A cabalistic jargon
Jabbers back
 And men at tables
 Spill Peloponnesian syllables
 And speak of shovels for street work
 And the new embankments of the Erie Railroad
 At Painted Post, Horse's Head, Salamanca

CAHOOTS

PLAY it across the table
What if we steal this city blind?
If they want any thing let 'em nail it down

Harness bulls, dicks, front office men,
And the high goats up on the bench,
Ain't they all in cahoots?

Ain't it fifty-fifty all down the line,
Petemen, dips, boosters, stick-ups and guns—
what's to hinder?

Go fifty-fifty
If they nail you call in a mouthpiece
Fix it, you gazump, you slant-head, fix it
Feed 'em

Nothin' ever sticks to my fingers, nah, nah,
nothin' like that,
But there ain't no law we got to wear mittens—
huh—is there?
Mittens, that's a good one—mittens!
There oughta be a law everybody wear mittens

BLUE MAROONS

"You slut," he flung at her
It was more than a hundred times
He had thrown it into her face
And by this time it meant nothing to her.
She said to herself upstairs sweeping,
"Clocks are to tell time with, pitchers
Hold milk, spoons dip out gravy, and a
Coffee pot keeps the respect of those
Who drink coffee—I am a woman whose
Husband gives her a kiss once for ten
Times he throws it in my face, 'You slut'
If I go to a small town and him along
Or if I go to a big city and him along,
What of it? Am I better off?" She swept
The upstairs and came downstairs to fix
Dinner for the family

THE HANGMAN AT HOME

WHAT does the hangman think about
When he goes home at night from work?
When he sits down with his wife and
Children for a cup of coffee and a
Plate of ham and eggs, do they ask
Him if it was a good day's work
And everything went well or do they
Stay off some topics and talk about
The weather, baseball, politics
And the comic strips in the papers
And the movies? Do they look at his
Hands when he reaches for the coffee
Or the ham and eggs? If the little
Ones say, Daddy, play horse, here's
A rope—does he answer like a joke
I seen enough rope for today?
Or does his face light up like a
Bonfire of joy and does he say
It's a good and dandy world we live
In And if a white face moon looks
In through a window where a baby girl
Sleeps and the moon-gleams mix with
Baby ears and baby hair—the hangman—
How does he act then? It must be easy
For him Anything is easy for a hangman,
I guess

MAN, THE MAN-HUNTER

I saw Man, the man-hunter,
Hunting with a torch in one hand
And a kerosene can in the other,
Hunting with guns, ropes, shackles

I listened
 And the high cry rang,
 The high cry of Man, the man-hunter
 We'll get you yet, you sbxyzch!

I listened later.
 The high cry rang.
 Kill him! kill him! the sbxyzch!

In the morning the sun saw
 Two butts of something, a smoking rump,
 And a warning in charred wood
 Well, we got him,
 the sbxyzch

THE SINS OF KALAMAZOO

THE sins of Kalamazoo are neither scarlet nor crimson
 The sins of Kalamazoo are a convict gray, a dishwater drab
 And the people who sin the sins of Kalamazoo are neither scarlet nor
 crimson
 They run to drabs and grays—and some of them sing they shall be washed
 whiter than snow—and some We should worry

Yes, Kalamazoo is a spot on the map
 And the passenger trains stop there
 And the factory smokestacks smoke
 And the grocery stores are open Saturday nights
 And the streets are free for citizens who vote
 And inhabitants counted in the census
 Saturday night is the big night
 Listen with your ears on a Saturday night in Kalamazoo
 And say to yourself I hear America, I hear, what do I hear?

Main street there runs through the middle of the town
 And there is a dirty post office
 And a dirty city hall
 And a dirty railroad station

And the United States flag cries, cries the Stars and Stripes to the four
winds on Lincoln's birthday and the Fourth of July

Kalamazoo kisses a hand to something far off
Kalamazoo calls to a long horizon, to a shivering silver angel, to a creeping
mystic what-is-it
"We're here because we're here," is the song of Kalamazoo
"We don't know where we're going but we're on our way," are the words
There are hound dogs of bronze on the public square, hound dogs looking
far beyond the public square

Sweethearts there in Kalamazoo
Go to the general delivery window of the post office
And speak their names and ask for letters
And ask again, "Are you sure there is nothing for me?"
I wish you'd look again—there must be a letter for me."

And sweethearts go to the city hall
And tell their names and say, "We want a license"
And they go to an installment house and buy a bed on time and a clock
And the children grow up asking each other, "What can we do to kill
time?"
They grow up and go to the railroad station and buy tickets for Texas,
Pennsylvania, Alaska
"Kalamazoo is all right," they say "But I want to see the world"
And when they have looked the world over they come back saying it is all
like Kalamazoo

The trains come in from the east and hoot for the crossings,
And buzz away to the peach country and Chicago to the west
Or they come from the west and shoot on to the Battle Creek breakfast
bazaars
And the speedbug heavens of Detroit

"I hear America, I hear, *what* do I hear?"
Said a loafer lagging along on the sidewalks of Kalamazoo,
Lagging along and asking questions, reading signs

Oh yes, there is a town named Kalamazoo,
A spot on the map where the trains hesitate

I saw the sign of a five and ten cent store there
And the Standard Oil Company and the International Harvester
And a graveyard and a ball grounds
And a short order counter where a man can get a stack of wheats
And a pool hall where a rounder leered confidential like and said
"Lookin' for a quiet game?"

The loafer lagged along and asked,
"Do you make guitars here?
Do you make boxes the singing wood winds ask to sleep in?
Do you rig up strings the singing wood winds sift over and sing low?"
The answer "We manufacture musical instruments here"

Here I saw churches with steeples like hatpins,
Undertaking rooms with sample coffins in the show window
And signs everywhere satisfaction is guaranteed,
Shooting galleries where men kill imitation pigeons,
And there were doctors for the sick,
And lawyers for people waiting in jail,
And a dog catcher and a superintendent of streets,
And telephones, water-works, trolley cars,
And newspapers with a splatter of telegrams from sister cities of Kalamazoo the round world over

And the loafer lagging along said
Kalamazoo, you ain't in a class by yourself,
I seen you before in a lot of places
If you are nuts America is nuts
 And lagging along he said bitterly
 Before I came to Kalamazoo I was silent
 Now I am gabby, God help me, I am gabby.

Kalamazoo, both of us will do a fadeaway
I will be carried out feet first
And time and the rain will chew you to dust
And the winds blow you away
And an old, old mother will lay a green moss cover on my bones
And a green moss cover on the stones of your post office and city hall

Best of all

I have loved your kiddies playing run-sheep-run
And cutting their initials on the ball ground fence
They knew every time I fooled them who was fooled and how

Best of all

I have loved the red gold smoke of your sunsets,
I have loved a moon with a ring around it
Floating over your public square,
I have loved the white dawn frost of early winter silver
And purple over your railroad tracks and lumber yards

The wishing heart of you I loved, Kalamazoo

I sang bye-lo, bye-lo to your dreams

I sang bye-lo to your hopes and songs

I wished to God there were hound dogs of bronze on your public square,

Hound dogs with bronze paws looking to a long horizon with a shivering
silver angel,

a creeping mystic what-is-it.

Broken-Face Gargoyles

BROKEN-FACE GARGOYLES

ALL I can give you is broken-face gargoyles

It is too early to sing and dance at funerals,

Though I can whisper to you I am looking for an undertaker humming
a lullaby and throwing his feet in a swift and mystic buck-and-wing,
now you see it and now you don't

Fish to swim a pool in your garden flashing a speckled silver,
A basket of wine-saps filling your room with flame-dark for your eyes and
the tang of valley orchards for your nose,
Such a beautiful pail of fish, such a beautiful peck of apples, I cannot
bring you now
It is too early and I am not footloose yet

I shall come in the night when I come with a hammer and saw
I shall come near your window, where you look out when your eyes open
in the morning,
And there I shall slam together bird-houses and bird-baths for wing-loose
wrens and hummers to live in, birds with yellow wing tips to blur
and buzz soft all summer,
So I shall make little fool homes with doors, always open doors for all
and each to run away when they want to
I shall come just like that even though now it is early and I am not yet
footloose,
Even though I am still looking for an undertaker with a raw, wind-bitten
face and a dance in his feet
I make a date with you (put it down) for six o'clock in the evening a
thousand years from now

All I can give you now is broken-face gargoyles
All I can give you now is a double gorilla head with two fish mouths and
four eagle eyes hooked on a street wall, spouting water and looking
two ways to the ends of the street for the new people, the young
strangers, coming, coming, always coming

It is early
I shall yet be footloose

APRONS OF SILENCE

MANY things I might have said today
And I kept my mouth shut
So many times I was asked
To come and say the same things
Everybody was saying, no end

To the yes-yes, yes-yes,
me-too, me-too

The aprons of silence covered me
A wire and hatch held my tongue.
I spit nails into an abyss and listened
I shut off the gabble of Jones, Johnson, Smith,
All whose names take pages in the city directory

I fixed up a padded cell and lugged it around
I locked myself in and nobody knew it
Only the keeper and the kept in the hoosegow
Knew it—on the streets, in the post office,
On the cars, into the railroad station
Where the caller was calling, "All a-board,
All a-board for Blaa-blaa Blaa-blaa,
Blaa-blaa and all points northwest all a-board"
Here I took along my own hoosegow
And did business with my own thoughts
Do you see? It must be the aprons of silence.

DEATH SNIPS PROUD MEN

DEATH is stronger than all the governments because the governments are
men and men die and then death laughs Now you see 'em, now you
don't

Death is stronger than all proud men and so death snips proud men on
the nose, throws a pair of dice and says Read 'em and weep

Death sends a radiogram every day When I want you I'll drop in—and
then one day he comes with a master-key and lets himself in and says
We'll go now

Death is a nurse mother with big arms 'Twon't hurt you at all, it's your
time now, you just need a long sleep, child, what have you had any-
how better than sleep?

GOOD NIGHT

MANY ways to spell good night

Fireworks at a pier on the Fourth of July
 spell it with red wheels and yellow spokes
They fizz in the air, touch the water and quit
Rockets make a trajectory of gold-and-blue
 and then go out

Railroad trains at night spell with a smokestack mushrooming a white
 pillar

Steamboats turn a curve in the Mississippi crying in a baritone that crosses
 lowland cottonfields to a razorback hill

It is easy to spell good night
 Many ways to spell good night

SHIRT

My shirt is a token and symbol,
more than a cover for sun and rain,
my shirt is a signal,
and a teller of souls

I can take off my shirt and tear it,
and so make a ripping razzly noise,
and the people will say,
"Look at him tear his shirt"

I can keep my shirt on
I can stick around and sing like a little bird
and look 'em all in the eye and never be fazed
 I can keep my shirt on.

JAZZ FANTASIA

DRUM on your drums, batter on your banjos,
sob on the long cool winding saxophones
Go to it, O jazzmen

Sling your knuckles on the bottoms of the happy
tin pans, let your trombones ooze, and go husha-
husha-hush with the slippery sand-paper

Moan like an autumn wind high in the lonesome treetops, moan soft like
you wanted somebody terrible, cry like a racing car slipping away from a
motorcycle cop, bang-bang! you jazzmen, bang altogether drums, traps,
banjos, horns, tin cans—make two people fight on the top of a stairway
and scratch each other's eyes in a clinch tumbling down the stairs.

Can the rough stuff now a Mississippi steamboat pushes up the night
river with a hoo-hoo-hoo-oo and the green lanterns calling to the high
soft stars a red moon rides on the humps of the low river hills . .
go to it, O jazzmen

DO YOU WANT AFFIDAVITS?

THERE's a hole in the bottom of the sea

Do you want affidavits?

There's a man in the moon with money for you

Do you want affidavits?

There are ten dancing girls in a sea-chamber off Nantucket waiting for you

There are tall candles in Timbuctoo burning penance for you

There are—anything else?

Speak now—for now we stand amid the great wishing windows—and the
law says we are free to be wishing all this week at the windows

Shall I raise my right hand and swear to you in the monotone of a notary
public? this is "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth"

"OLD-FASHIONED REQUITED LOVE"

I HAVE ransacked the encyclopedias
And slid my fingers among topics and titles
Looking for you

And the answer comes slow
There seems to be no answer

I shall ask the next banana peddler the who and the why of it

Or—the iceman with his iron tongs gripping a clear cube in summer sun-
light—maybe he will know

PURPLE MARTINS

IF WE were such and so, the same as these,
maybe we too would be slingers and sliders,
tumbling half over in the water mirrors,
tumbling half over at the horse heads of the sun,
tumbling our purple numbers

Twirl on, you and your satin blue
Be water birds, be air birds
Be these purple tumblers you are

Dip and get away
From loops into slip-knots,
Write your own ciphers and figure eights
It is your wooded island here in Lincoln park
Everybody knows this belongs to you

Five fat geese
Eat grass on a sod bank
And never count your slinging ciphers,
your sliding figure eights,

A man on a green paint iron bench,
Slouches his feet and sniffs in a book,
And looks at you and your loops and slip-knots,
And looks at you and your sheaths of satin blue,
And slouches again and sniffs in the book,
And mumbles It is an idle and a doctrinaire exploit
Go on tumbling half over in the water mirrors
Go on tumbling half over at the horse heads of the sun
Be water birds, be air birds
Be these purple tumblers you are

BRASS KEYS

Joy weaving two violet petals for a coat lapel
painting on a slab of night sky a Christ face
slipping new brass keys into rusty iron locks and
shouldering till at last the door gives and we are in
a new room forever and ever violet petals, slabs,
the Christ face, brass keys and new rooms

are we near or far? . is there anything else? who comes back?
and why does love ask nothing and give all? and why is love rare as
a tailed comet shaking guesses out of men at telescopes ten feet long? why
does the mystery sit with its chin on the lean forearm of women in gray
eyes and women in hazel eyes?

are any of these less proud, less important, than a cross-examining lawyer?
are any of these less perfect than the front page of a morning newspaper?

the answers are not computed and attested in the back of an arithmetic
for the verifications of the lazy

there is no authority in the phone book for us to call
and ask the why, the wherefore, and the howbeit
it's . a riddle . by God

PICK-OFFS

THE telescope picks off star dust
on the clean steel sky and sends it to me

The telephone picks off my voice and
sends it cross country a thousand miles

The eyes in my head pick off pages of
Napoleon memoirs a rag handler,
a head of dreams walks in a sheet of
mist the palace panels shut in no-
bodies drinking nothings out of silver
helmets in the end we all come to a
rock island and the hold of the sea-walls

MANUFACTURED GODS

THEY put up big wooden gods
Then they burned the big wooden gods
And put up brass gods and
Changing their minds suddenly
Knocked down the brass gods and put up
A doughface god with gold earrings
The poor mutts, the pathetic slant heads,
They didn't know a little tin god
Is as good as anything in the line of gods
Nor how a little tin god answers prayer
And makes rain and brings luck
The same as a big wooden god or a brass
God or a doughface god with golden
Earrings

MASK

To have your face left overnight
Flung on a board by a crazy sculptor,
To have your face drop off a board

And fall to pieces on a floor
Lost among lumps all finger-marked
—How now?

To be calm and level, placed high,
Looking among perfect women bathing
And among bareheaded long-armed men,
Corner dreams of a crazy sculptor,
And then to fall, drop clean off the board,
Four o'clock in the morning and not a dog
Nor a policeman anywhere—

Hoo hoo!
had it been my laughing face
maybe I would laugh with you,
but my lover's face, the face I give
women and the moon and the sea!

Playthings of the Wind

FOUR PRELUDES ON PLAYTHINGS OF THE WIND

"The past is a bucket of ashes"

1

THE woman named Tomorrow
sits with a hairpin in her teeth
and takes her time
and does her hair the way she wants it
and fastens at last the last braid and coil
and puts the hairpin where it belongs

and turns and drawls Well, what of it?
My grandmother, Yesterday, is gone
What of it? Let the dead be dead

2

The doors were cedar
and the panels strips of gold
and the girls were golden girls
and the panels read and the girls chanted
 We are the greatest city,
 the greatest nation
 nothing like us ever was
The doors are twisted on broken hinges
Sheets of rain swish through on the wind
 where the golden girls ran and the panels read
 We are the greatest city,
 the greatest nation,
 nothing like us ever was

3

It has happened before
Strong men put up a city and got
 a nation together,
And paid singers to sing and women
 to warble We are the greatest city,
 the greatest nation,
 nothing like us ever was.

And while the singers sang
and the strong men listened
and paid the singers well
and felt good about it all,
 there were rats and lizards who listened
 . . and the only listeners left now
 . . are . the rats . and the lizards.

And there are black crows
crying, "Caw, caw,"
bringing mud and sticks
building a nest

over the words carved
on the doors where the panels were cedar
and the strips on the panels were gold
and the golden girls came singing
 We are the greatest city,
 the greatest nation
 nothing like us ever was

The only singers now are crows crying, "Caw, caw,"
And the sheets of rain whine in the wind and doorways
And the only listeners now are . . . the rats . . . and the lizards

4

The feet of the rats
scribble on the doorsills,
the hieroglyphs of the rat footprints
chatter the pedigrees of the rats
and babble of the blood
and gabble of the breed
of the grandfathers and the great-grandfathers
of the rats

And the wind shifts
and the dust on a doorsill shifts
and even the writing of the rat footprints
tells us nothing, nothing at all
about the greatest city, the greatest nation
where the strong men listened
and the women warbled Nothing like us ever was.

BROKEN TABERNACLES

HAVE I broken the smaller tabernacles, O Lord?
And in the destruction of these set up the greater and massive, the everlasting tabernacles?
I know nothing today, what I have done and why, O Lord, only I have
 broken and broken tabernacles
They were beautiful in a way, these tabernacles torn down by strong
 hands swearing—

They were beautiful—why did the hypocrites carve their own names on
the corner-stones? why did the hypocrites keep on singing their own
names in their long noses every Sunday in these tabernacles?
Who lays any blame here among the split corner-stones?

OSAWATOMIE

I DON'T know how he came,
shambling, dark, and strong

He stood in the city and told men
My people are fools, my people are young and strong, my people must
learn, my people are terrible workers and fighters
Always he kept on asking Where did that blood come from?

They said You for the fool killer,
you for the booby hatch
and a necktie party

They hauled him into jail
They sneered at him and spit on him,
And he wrecked their jails,
Singing, "God damn your jails,"
And when he was most in jail
Crummy among the crazy in the dark
Then he was most of all out of jail
Shambling, dark, and strong,
Always asking Where did that blood come from?
They laid hands on him
And the fool killers had a laugh
And the necktie party was a go, by God
They laid hands on him and he was a goner
They hammered him to pieces and he stood up
They buried him and he walked out of the grave, by God,
Asking again. Where did that blood come from?

LONG GUNS

THEN came, Oscar, the time of the guns
And there was no land for a man, no land for a country,
 Unless guns sprang up
 And spoke their language
The how of running the world was all in guns

The law of a God keeping sea and land apart,
The law of a child sucking milk,
The law of stars held together,
 They slept and worked in the heads of men
 Making twenty mile guns, sixty mile guns,
 Speaking their language
 Of no land for a man, no land for a country
Unless guns unless guns

There was a child wanted the moon shot off the sky,
 asking a long gun to get the moon,
 to conquer the insults of the moon,
 to conquer something, anything,
 to put it over and win the day,
To show them the running of the world was all in guns
There was a child wanted the moon shot off the sky.
They dreamed in the time of the guns . of guns

DUSTY DOORS

CHILD of the Aztec gods,
how long must we listen here,
how long before we go?

The dust is deep on the lintels
The dust is dark on the doors
If the dreams shake our bones,
 what can we say or do?

Since early morning we waited
Since early, early morning, child
There must be dreams on the way now
There must be a song for our bones

The dust gets deeper and darker
Do the doors and lintels shudder?
How long must we listen here?
How long before we go?

FLASH CRIMSON

I SHALL cry God to give me a broken foot

I shall ask for a scar and a slashed nose

I shall take the last and the worst

I shall be eaten by gray creepers in a bunkhouse where no runners of the
sun come and no dogs live

And yet—of all “and yet” this is the bronze strongest—

I shall keep one thing better than all else, there is the blue steel of a great
star of early evening in it, it lives longer than a broken foot or any
scar

The broken foot goes to a hole dug with a shovel or the bone of a nose
may whiten on a hilltop—and yet—“and yet”—

There is one crimson pinch of ashes left after all, and none of the shifting
winds that whip the grass and none of the pounding rains that beat
the dust, know how to touch or find the flash of this crimson

I cry God to give me a broken foot, a scar, or a lousy death

I who have seen the flash of this crimson, I ask God for the last and worst

THE LAWYERS KNOW TOO MUCH

THE lawyers, Bob, know too much
They are chums of the books of old John Marshall
They know it all, what a dead hand wrote,
A stiff dead hand and its knuckles crumbling,
The bones of the fingers a thin white ash
The lawyers know
a dead man's thoughts too well

In the heels of the higgling lawyers, Bob,
Too many slippery ifs and buts and howevers,
Too much hereinbefore provided whereas,
Too many doors to go in and out of

When the lawyers are through
What is there left, Bob?
Can a mouse nibble at it
And find enough to fasten a tooth in?

Why is there always a secret singing
When a lawyer cashes in?
Why does a hearse horse snicker
Hauling a lawyer away?

The work of a bricklayer goes to the blue
The knack of a mason outlasts a moon
The hands of a plasterer hold a room together
The land of a farmer wishes him back again
Singers of songs and dreamers of plays
Build a house no wind blows over
The lawyers—tell me why a hearse horse snickers hauling a lawyer's bones

LOSERS

IF I should pass the tomb of Jonah
I would stop there and sit for a while,
Because I was swallowed one time deep in the dark
And came out alive after all

If I pass the burial spot of Nero
I shall say to the wind, "Well, well"—
I who have fiddled in a world on fire,
I who have done so many stunts not worth doing

I am looking for the grave of Sinbad too
I want to shake his ghost-hand and say,
"Neither of us died very early, did we?"

And the last sleeping-place of Nebuchadnezzar—
When I arrive there I shall tell the wind
"You ate grass, I have eaten crow—
Who is better off now or next year?"

Jack Cade, John Brown, Jesse James,
There too I could sit down and stop for a while
I think I could tell their headstones
"God, let me remember all good losers"

I could ask people to throw ashes on their heads
In the name of that sergeant at Belleau Woods,
Walking into the drumfires, calling his men,
"Come on, you Do you want to live forever?"

PLACES

Roses and gold
For you today,
And the flash of flying flags

I will have
Ashes,
Dust in my hair,
Crushes of hoofs

Your name
Fills the mouth
Of rich man and poor

Women bring
Armfuls of flowers
And throw on you

I go hungry
Down in dreams
And loneliness,
Across the rain
To slashed hills
Where men wait and hope for me

THREES

I WAS a boy when I heard three red words
a thousand Frenchmen died in the streets
for Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—I asked
why men die for words

I was older, men with mustaches, sideburns,
lilacs, told me the high golden words are
Mother, Home, and Heaven—other older men with
face decorations said God, Duty, Immortality
—they sang these threes slow from deep lungs

Years ticked off their say-so on the great clocks
of doom and damnation, soup and nuts meteors flashed
their say-so and out of great Russia came three
dusky syllables workmen took guns and went out to die
for Bread, Peace, Land

And I met a marine of the U S A, a leatherneck with a girl on his knee
for a memory in ports circling the earth and he said Tell me how to say
three things and I always get by—gimme a plate of ham and eggs—how
much?—and—do you love me, kid?

THE LIARS

(March, 1919)

A LIAR goes in fine clothes
A liar goes in rags
A liar is a liar, clothes or no clothes
A liar is a liar and lives on the lies he tells
 and dies in a life of lies
And the stonecutters earn a living—with lies—
 on the tombs of liars

A liar looks 'em in the eye
And lies to a woman,
Lies to a man, a pal, a child, a fool
And he is an old liar, we know him many years back.

A liar lies to nations
A liar lies to the people
A liar takes the blood of the people
And drinks this blood with a laugh and a lie,
 A laugh in his neck,
 A lie in his mouth
And this liar is an old one, we know him many years.
 He is straight as a dog's hind leg
 He is straight as a corkscrew
He is white as a black cat's foot at midnight

The tongue of a man is tied on this,
On the liar who lies to nations,
The liar who lies to the people
The tongue of a man is tied on this
And ends To hell with 'em all
 To hell with 'em all

It's a song hard as a nveter's hammer,
 Hard as the sleep of a crummy hobo,
 Hard as the sleep of a lousy doughboy,
Twisted as a shell-shock idiot's gibber

The liars met where the doors were locked
They said to each other Now for war
The liars fixed it and told 'em Go

Across their tables they fixed it up,
Behind their doors away from the mob
And the guns did a job that nicked off millions
The guns blew seven million off the map,
The guns sent seven million west
Seven million shoving up the daisies
Across their tables they fixed it up,
The liars who lie to nations

And now
Out of the butcher's job
And the boneyard junk the maggots have cleaned,
Where the jaws of skulls tell the jokes of war ghosts,
Out of this they are calling now Let's go back where we were
Let us run the world again, us, us
Where the doors are locked the liars say Wait and we'll cash in again

So I hear The People talk
I hear them tell each other
Let the strong men be ready
Let the strong men watch
Let your wrists be cool and your head clear
Let the liars get their finish,
The liars and their waiting game, waiting a day again
To open the doors and tell us War! get out to your war again

So I hear The People tell each other
Look at today and tomorrow
Fix this clock that nicks off millions
When The Liars say it's time
Take things in your own hands
To hell with 'em all,
The liars who lie to nations,
The liars who lie to The People

PRAYER AFTER WORLD WAR

WANDERING oversea dreamer,
Hunting and hoarse, Oh daughter and mother,
Oh daughter of ashes and mother of blood,
Child of the hair let down, and tears,
Child of the cross in the south
And the star in the north,
Keeper of Egypt and Russia and France,
Keeper of England and Poland and Spain,
Make us a song for tomorrow
Make us one new dream, us who forget,
Out of the storm let us have one star

Struggle, Oh anvils, and help her
Weave with your wool, Oh winds and skies
Let your iron and copper help,
 Oh dirt of the old dark earth

Wandering oversea singer,
Singing of ashes and blood,
Child of the scars of fire,
 Make us one new dream, us who forget
 Out of the storm let us have one star

A E F

THERE will be a rusty gun on the wall, sweetheart,
The rifle grooves curling with flakes of rust
A spider will make a silver string nest in the
 darkest, warmest corner of it
The trigger and the range-finder, they too will be rusty
And no hands will polish the gun, and it will hang on the wall
Forefingers and thumbs will point absently and casually toward it
It will be spoken among half-forgotten, wished-to-be-forgotten things
They will tell the spider Go on, you're doing good work

BAS-RELIEF

FIVE geese deploy mysteriously
Onward proudly with flagstuffs,
Hearses with silver bugles,
Bushels of plum-blossoms dropping
For ten mystic web-feet—
Each his own drum-major,
Each charged with the honor
Of the ancient goose nation,
Each with a nose-length surpassing
The nose-lengths of rival nations
Somberly, slowly, unimpeachably,
Five geese deploy mysteriously

CARLOVINGIAN DREAMS

COUNT these reminiscences like money
The Greeks had their picnics under another name
The Romans wore glad rags and told their neighbors, "What of it?"
The Carolingians hauling logs on carts, they too
Stuck their noses in the air and stuck their thumbs to their noses
And tasted life as a symphonic dream of fresh eggs broken over a frying
 pan left by an uncle who killed men with spears and short swords
Count these reminiscences like money

Drift, and drift on, white ships
Sailing the free sky blue, sailing and changing and sailing,
Oh, I remember in the blood of my dreams how they sang before me
Oh, they were men and women who got money for their work, money or
 love or dreams

 Sail on, white ships

 Let me have spring dreams

Let me count reminiscences like money, let me count picnics, glad rags
and the great bad manners of the Carolingians breaking fresh eggs
in the copper pans of their proud uncles.

BRONZES

THEY ask me to handle bronzes
Kept by children in China
Three thousand years
Since their fathers
Took fire and molds and hammers
And made these

The Ming, the Chou,
And other dynasties,
Out, gone, reckoned in ciphers,
Dynasties dressed up
In old gold and old yellow—
They saw these

Let the wheels
Of three thousand years
Turn, turn, turn on

Let one poet then
(One will be enough)
Handle these bronzes
And mention the dynasties
And pass them along

LET LOVE GO ON

LET it go on, let the love of this hour be poured out till all the answers
are made, the last dollar spent and the last blood gone

Time runs with an ax and a hammer, time slides down the hallways with
a pass-key and a master-key, and time gets by, time wins

Let the love of this hour go on, let all the oaths and children and people
of this love be clean as a washed stone under a waterfall in the sun

Time is a young man with ballplayer legs, time runs a winning race
against life and the clocks, time tickles with rust and spots

Let love go on, the heartbeats are measured out with a measuring glass,
so many apiece to gamble with, to use and spend and reckon, let
love go on

KILLERS

I AM put high over all others in the city today
I am the killer who kills for those who wish a killing today

Here is a strong young man who killed
There was a driving wind of city dust and horse dung blowing and he
stood at an intersection of five sewers and there pumped the bullets
of an automatic pistol into another man, a fellow citizen
Therefore, the prosecuting attorneys, fellow citizens, and a jury of his
peers, also fellow citizens, listened to the testimony of other fellow
citizens, policemen, doctors, and after a verdict of guilty, the judge,
a fellow citizen, said I sentence you to be hanged by the neck till
you are dead

So there is a killer to be killed and I am the killer of the killer for today
I don't know why it beats in my head in the lines I read once in an old
school reader I'm to be queen of the May, mother, I'm to be queen
of the May
Anyhow it comes back in language just like that today

I am the high honorable killer today
There are five million people in the state, five million killers for whom
I kill
I am the killer who kills today for five million killers who wish a killing

CLEAN HANDS

It is something to face the sun and know you are free
To hold your head in the shafts of daylight slanting the earth
And know your heart has kept a promise and the blood runs clean
It is something

To go one day of your life among all men with clean hands,
 Clean for the day book today and the record of the after days,
 Held at your side proud, satisfied to the last, and ready,
 So to have clean hands

God, it is something,

One day of life so

And a memory fastened till the stars sputter out

And a love washed as white linen in the noon drying

Yes, go find the men of clean hands one day and see the life, the memory,
 the love they have, to stay longer than the plunging sea wets the
 shores or the fires heave under the crust of the earth

O yes, clean hands is the chant and only one man knows its sob and its
 undersong and he dies clenching the secret more to him than any
 woman or chum

And O the great brave men, the silent little brave men, proud of their
 hands—clutching the knuckles of their fingers into fists ready for
 death and the dark, ready for life and the fight, the pay and the
 memories—O the men proud of their hands

THREE GHOSTS

THREE tailors of Tooley Street wrote We, the People
 The names are forgotten It is a joke in ghosts

Cutters or bushelmen or armhole basters, they sat
 cross-legged stitching, snatched at scissors, stole each
 other's thimbles

Cross-legged, working for wages, joking each other
 as misfits cut from the cloth of a Master Tailor,
 they sat and spoke their thoughts of the glory of
 The People, they met after work and drank beer to
 The People

Faded off into the twilights the names are forgotten It is a joke in ghosts
 Let it ride They wrote We, The People

PENCILS

PENCILS

telling where the wind comes from
open a story

Pencils

telling where the wind goes
end a story

These eager pencils

come to a stop

only when the stars high over
come to a stop

Out of cabalistic tomorrows
come cryptic babies calling life
a strong and a lovely thing

I have seen neither these
nor the stars high over
come to a stop

Neither these nor the sea horses
running with the clocks of the moon
Nor even a shooting star
snatching a pencil of fire
writing a curve of gold and white

Like you I counted the shooting stars of a
winter night and my head was dizzy with all
of them calling one by one

Look for us again

JUG

THE shale and water thrown together so-so first of all,
Then a potter's hand on the wheel and his fingers shaping the jug, out
of the mud a mouth and a handle,
Slimsy, loose and ready to fall at a touch, fire plays on it, slow fire coax-
ing all the water out of the shale mix
Dipped in glaze more fire plays on it till a molasses lava runs in waves,
rises and retreats, a varnish of volcanoes
Take it now, out of mud now here is a mouth and handle, out of this
now mothers will pour milk and maple syrup and cider, vinegar, apple
juice, and sorghum
There is nothing proud about this, only one out of many, the potter's
wheel slings them out and the fires harden them hours and hours
thousands and thousands.
"Be good to me, put me down easy on the floors of the new concrete
houses, I was poured out like a concrete house and baked in fire too"

AND THIS WILL BE ALL?

AND this will be all?
And the gates will never open again?
And the dust and the wind will play around the rusty door hinges and
the songs of October moan, Why-oh, why-oh?

And you will look to the mountains
And the mountains will look to you
And you will wish you were a mountain
And the mountain will wish nothing at all?
This will be all?
The gates will never-never open again?

The dust and the wind only
And the rusty door hinges and moaning October
And Why-oh, why-oh, in the moaning dry leaves,
This will be all?

Nothing in the air but songs
And no singers, no mouths to know the songs?
You tell us a woman with a heartache tells you it is so?
This will be all?

HOODLUMS

I AM a hoodlum, you are a hoodlum, we and all of us are a world of hoodlums—maybe so
I hate and kill better men than I am, so do you, so do all of us—maybe—maybe so
In the ends of my fingers the itch for another man's neck, I want to see him hanging, one of dusk's cartoons against the sunset
This is the hate my father gave me, this was in my mother's milk, this is you and me and all of us in a world of hoodlums—maybe so
Let us go on, brother hoodlums, let us kill and kill, it has always been so, it will always be so, there is nothing more to it
Let us go on, sister hoodlums, kill, kill, and kill, the torsos of the world's mothers are tireless and the loins of the world's fathers are strong—so go on—kill, kill, kill
Lay them deep in the dirt, the stuffs we fixed, the cadavers bumped off, lay them deep and let the night winds of winter blizzards howl their burial service
The night winds and the winter, the great white sheets of northern blizzards, who can sing better for the lost hoodlums the old requiem, "Kill him! kill him! "
Today my son, tomorrow yours, the day after your next door neighbor's—it is all in the wrists of the gods who shoot craps—it is anybody's guess whose eyes shut next
Being a hoodlum now, you and I, being all of us a world of hoodlums, let us take up the cry when the mob sluffs by on a thousand shoe soles, let us too yammer, "Kill him! kill him! . . ."
Let us do this now . for our mothers for our sisters and wives
. . . let us kill, kill, kill—for the torsos of the women are tireless and the loins of the men are strong

[CHICAGO, July 29, 1919]

YES, THE DEAD SPEAK TO US

Yes, the Dead speak to us
This town belongs to the Dead, to the Dead and to the Wilderness

Back of the clamps on a fireproof door they hold the papers of the Dead
in a house here
And when two living men fall out, when one says the Dead spoke a
Yes, and the other says the Dead spoke a No, they go then together
to this house

They loosen the clamps and haul at the hasps and try their keys and
curse at the locks and the combination numbers
For the teeth of the rats are barred and the tongues of the moths are
outlawed and the sun and the air of wind is not wanted

They open a box where a sheet of paper shivers, in a dusty corner shivers
with the dry inkdrops of the Dead, the signed names
Here the ink testifies, here we find the say-so, here we learn the layout,
now we know where the cities and farms belong

Dead white men and dead red men
tested each other with shot and
knives they twisted each other's
necks land was yours if you took and
kept it

How are the heads the rain seeps
in, the rain-washed knuckles in
sod and gumbo?

Where the sheets of paper shiver,
Back of the hasps and handles,
Back of the fireproof clamps,

They read what the fingers scribbled, who the land belongs to now—it is
herein provided, it is hereby stipulated—the land and all appurtenances
thereto and all deposits of oil and gold and coal and silver, and all pockets
and repositories of gravel and diamonds, dung and permanganese, and all

clover and bumblebees, all bluegrass, johnny-jump-ups, grassroots, springs of running water or rivers or lakes or high spreading trees or hazel bushes or sumach or thorn-apple branches or high in the air the bird nest with spotted blue eggs shaken in the roaming wind of the treetops—

So it is scrawled here,
"I direct and devise
So and so and such and such,"
And this is the last word
There is nothing more to it

In a shanty out in the Wilderness, ghosts of tomorrow sit, waiting to come and go, to do their job

They will go into the house of the Dead and take the shivering sheets of paper and make a bonfire and dance a deadman's dance over the hissing crisp

In a slang their own the dancers out of the Wilderness will write a paper for the living to read and sign

The dead need peace, the dead need sleep, let the dead have peace and sleep, let the papers of the Dead who fix the lives of the Living, let them be a hissing crisp and ashes, let the young men and the young women forever understand we are through and no longer take the say-so of the Dead,

Let the dead have honor from us with our thoughts of them and our thoughts of land and all appurtenances thereto and all deposits of oil and gold and coal and silver, and all pockets and repositories of gravel and diamonds, dung and permanganese, and all clover and bumblebees, all bluegrass, johnny-jump-ups, grassroots, springs of running water or rivers or lakes or high spreading trees or hazel bushes or sumach or thorn-apple branches or high in the air the bird nest with spotted blue eggs shaken in the roaming wind of the treetops

And so, it is a shack of ghosts, a lean-to they have in the Wilderness, and they are waiting and they have learned strange songs how easy it is to wait and how anything comes to those who wait long enough and how most of all it is easy to wait for death, and waiting, dream of new cities

Mist Forms

CALLS

BECAUSE I have called to you
as the flame flamingo calls,
or the want of a spotted hawk
is called—

because in the dusk
the warblers shoot the running
waters of short songs to the
homecoming warblers—

because
the cry here is wing to wing
and song to song—

I am waiting,
waiting with the flame flamingo,
the spotted hawk, the running water
warbler—

waiting for you

SEA-WASH

THE sea-wash never ends
The sea-wash repeats, repeats
Only old songs? Is that all the sea knows?
Only the old strong songs?
Is that all?
The sea-wash repeats, repeats

SILVER WIND

Do you know how the dream looms? how if summer misses one of us
the two of us miss summer—

Summer when the lungs of the earth take a long breath for the change
to low contralto singing mornings when the green corn leaves first
break through the black loam—

And another long breath for the silver soprano melody of the moon
songs in the light nights when the earth is lighter than a feather,
the iron mountains lighter than a goose down—

So I shall look for you in the light nights then, in the laughter of slats
of silver under a hill hickory.

In the listening tops of the hickories, in the wind motions of the hickory
shingle leaves, in the imitations of slow sea water on the shingle
silver in the wind—

I shall look for you

EVENING WATERFALL

WHAT was the name you called me?—
And why did you go so soon?

The crows lift their caw on the wind,
And the wind changed and was lonely

The warblers cry their sleepy-songs
Across the valley gloaming,
Across the cattle-horns of early stars

Feathers and people in the crotch of a treetop
Throw an evening waterfall of sleepy-songs

What was the name you called me?—
And why did you go so soon?

CRUCIBLE

HOT gold runs a winding stream on the inside of a green bowl

Yellow trickles in a fan figure, scatters a line of skirmishers, spreads a chorus of dancing girls, performs blazing ochre evolutions, gathers the whole show into one stream, forgets the past and rolls on

The sea-mist green of the bowl's bottom is a dark throat of sky crossed by quarreling forks of umber and ochre and yellow changing faces

SUMMER STARS

BEND low again, night of summer stars
So near you are, sky of summer stars,
So near, a long-arm man can pick off stars,
Pick off what he wants in the sky bowl,
So near you are, summer stars,
So near, strumming, strumming,
So lazy and hum-strumming

THROW ROSES

THROW roses on the sea where the dead went down
The roses speak to the sea,
And the sea to the dead
Throw roses, O lovers—
Let the leaves wash on the salt in the sun.

JUST BEFORE APRIL CAME

THE snow-piles in dark places are gone
Pools by the railroad tracks shine clear
The gravel of all shallow places shines
A white pigeon reels and somersaults

Frogs plutter and sudge—and frogs beat
the air with a recurring thin
steel sliver of melody
Crows go in fives and tens, they march their
black feathers past a blue pool, they
celebrate an old festival
A spider is trying his webs, a pink bug sits
on my hand washing his forelegs
I might ask Who are these people?

STARS, SONGS, FACES

GATHER the stars if you wish it so
Gather the songs and keep them
Gather the faces of women
Gather for keeping years and years
And then
Loosen your hands, let go and say good-by
Let the stars and songs go
Let the faces and years go
Loosen your hands and say good-by

SANDPIPERS

TEN miles of flat land along the sea
Sandland where the salt water kills the sweet potatoes
Homes for sandpipers—the script of their feet is on the sea shingles—
they write in the morning, it is gone at noon—they write at noon, it
is gone at night
Pity the land, the sea, the ten mile flats, pity anything but the sand-
pipers' wire legs and feet

THREE VIOLINS

THREE violins are trying their hearts
The piece is MacDowell's Wild Rose
And the time of the wild rose

And the leaves of the wild rose
And the dew-shot eyes of the wild rose
Sing in the air over three violins
Somebody like you was in the heart of MacDowell
Somebody like you is in three violins

THE WIND SINGS WELCOME IN EARLY SPRING
(*For Paula*)

THE grip of the ice is gone now
The silvers chase purple
The purples tag silver
They let out their runners
Here where summer says to the lilies
"Wish and be wistful,
Circle this wind-hunted, wind-sung water"

Come along always, come along now
You for me, kiss me, pull me by the ear
Push me along with the wind push
Sing like the whinnying wind
Sing like the hustling obstreperous wind

Have you ever seen deeper purple
this in my wild wind fingers?
Could you have more fun with a pony or a goat?
Have you seen such flicking heels before,
Silver pig heels on the purple sky rim?
Come along always, come along now

TAWNY

THESE are the tawny days your face comes back

The grapes take on purple the sunsets redden
early on the trellis.

The bashful mornings hurl gray mist on the stripes
of sunrise.

Creep, silver on the field, the frost is welcome

Run on, yellow balls on the hills, and you tawny
pumpkin flowers, chasing your lines of orange

Tawny days and your face again

SLIPPERY

THE six month child
Fresh from the tub
Wiggles in our hands
This is our fish child
Give her a nickname Slippery

HELGA

THE wishes on this child's mouth
Came like snow on marsh cranberries,
The tamarack kept something for her,
The wind is ready to help her shoes
The north has loved her, she will be
A grandmother feeding geese on frosty
Mornings, she will understand
Early snow on the cranberries
Better and better then

BABY TOES

THERE is a blue star, Janet,
Fifteen years' ride from us,
If we ride a hundred miles an hour.

There is a white star, Janet,
Forty years' ride from us,
If we ride a hundred miles an hour.

Shall we ride
To the blue star
Or the white star?

PEOPLE WITH PROUD CHINS

I TELL them where the wind comes from,
Where the music goes when the fiddle is in the box

Kids—I saw one with a proud chin, a sleepyhead,
And the moonline creeping white on her pillow
I have seen their heads in the starlight
And their proud chins marching in a mist of stars

They are the only people I never lie to
I give them honest answers,
Answers shrewd as the circles of white on brown chestnuts

WINTER MILK

THE milk-drops on your chin, Helga,
Must not interfere with the cranberry red of your cheeks
Nor the sky winter blue of your eyes
Let your mammy keep hands off the chin
This is a high holy spatter of white on the reds and blues

Before the bottle was taken away,
Before you so proudly began today
Drinking your milk from the rim of a cup
They did not splash this high holy white on your chin

There are dreams in your eyes, Helga
Tall reaches of wind sweep the clear blue
The winter is young yet, so young
Only a little cupful of winter has touched your lips
Drink on milk with your lips dreams with your eyes

SLEEPYHEADS

SLEEP is a maker of makers Birds sleep Feet cling to a perch. Look at the balance Let the legs loosen, the backbone untwist, the head go heavy over, the whole works tumbles a done bird off the perch

Fox cubs sleep The pointed head curls round into hind legs and tail It is a ball of red hair It is a muff waiting A wind might whisk it in the air across pastures and rivers, a cocoon, a pod of seeds The snooze of the black nose is in a circle of red hair

Old men sleep In chimney corners, in rocking chairs, at wood stoves, steam radiators They talk and forget and nod and are out of talk with closed eyes Forgetting to live Knowing the time has come useless for them to live Old eagles and old dogs run and fly in the dreams

Babies sleep In flannels the papoose faces, the bambino noses, and dodo, dodo the song of many matushkas Babies—a leaf on a tree in the spring sun A nub of a new thing sucks the sap of a tree in the sun, yes a new thing, a what-is-it? A left hand stirs, an eyelid twitches, the milk in the belly bubbles and gets to be blood and a left hand and an eyelid Sleep is a maker of makers

SUMACH AND BIRDS

If you never came with a pigeon rainbow purple
Shining in the six o'clock September dusk
If the red sumach on the autumn roads
Never danced on the flame of your eyelashes
If the red-haws never burst in a million
Crimson fingertwists of your heartcrying
If all this beauty of yours never crushed me
Then there are many flying acres of birds for me,
Many drumming gray wings going home I shall see,
Many crying voices riding the north wind

WOMEN WASHING THEIR HAIR

THEY have painted and sung
the women washing their hair,
and the plaits and strands in the sun,
and the golden combs
and the combs of elephant tusks
and the combs of buffalo horn and hoof

The sun has been good to women,
drying their heads of hair
as they stooped and shook their shoulders
and framed their faces with copper
and framed their eyes with dusk or chestnut

The rain has been good to women
If the rain should forget,
if the rain left off for a year—
the heads of women would wither,
the copper, the dusk and chestnuts, go

They have painted and sung
the women washing their hair—
reckon the sun and rain in, too

PEACH BLOSSOMS

WHAT cry of peach blossoms
let loose on the air today
I heard with my face thrown
in the pink-white of it all?
in the red whisper of it all?

What man I heard saying
Christ, these are beautiful!

And Christ and Christ was in his mouth,
over these peach blossoms?

HALF MOON IN A HIGH WIND

MONEY is nothing now, even if I had it,
O mooney moon, yellow half moon,
Up over the green pines and gray elms,
Up in the new blue

Streel, streel,
White lacey mist sheets of cloud,
Streel in the blowing of the wind,
Streel over the blue-and-moon sky,
Yellow gold half moon It is light
On the snow, it is dark on the snow,
Streel, O lacey thin sheets, up in the new blue

Come down, stay there, move on
I want you, I don't, keep all
There is no song to your singing
I am hit deep, you drive far,
O mooney yellow half moon,
Steady, steady, or will you tip over?
Or will the wind and the streeling
Thin sheets only pass and move on
And leave you alone and lovely?
I want you, I don't, come down,
Stay there, move on
Money is nothing now, even if I had it

REMORSE

THE horse's name was Remorse
There were people said, "Gee, what a nag!"
And they were Edgar Allan Poe bugs and so
They called him Remorse

When he was a gelding
He flashed his heels to other ponies
And threw dust in the noses of other ponies

And won his first race and his second
And another and another and hardly ever
Came under the wire behind the other runners

And so, Remorse, who is gone, was the hero of a play
By Henry Blossom, who is now gone

What is there to a monicker? Call me anything
A nut, a cheese, something that the cat brought in
Nick me with any old name

Class me up for a fish, a gorilla, a slant head, an egg, a ham
Only slam me across the ears sometimes and hunt for a white
star

In my forehead and twist the bang of my forelock around it
Make a wish for me Maybe I will light out like a streak of wind

RIVER MOONS

THE double moon, one on the high backdrop of the west, one on the
curve of the river face,

The sky moon of fire and the river moon of water, I am taking these
home in a basket, hung on an elbow, such a teeny weeny elbow, in
my head

I saw them last night, a cradle moon, two horns of a moon, such an early
hopeful moon, such a child's moon for all young hearts to make a
picture of

The river—I remember this like a picture—the river was the upper twist
of a written question mark

I know now it takes many many years to write a river, a twist of water
asking a question

And white stars moved when the moon moved, and one red star kept burn-
ing, and the Big Dipper was almost overhead

SAND SCRIBBLINGS

THE wind stops, the wind begins
The wind says stop, begin

A sea shovel scrapes the sand floor
The shovel changes, the floor changes.

The sandpipers, maybe they know
Maybe a three-pointed foot can tell
Maybe the fog moon they fly to, guesses

The sandpipers cheep "Here" and get away.
Five of them fly and keep together flying

Night hair of some sea woman
Curls on the sand when the sea leaves
The salt tide without a good-by

Boxes on the beach are empty
Shake 'em and the nails loosen
They have been somewhere

HOW YESTERDAY LOOKED

THE high horses of the sea broke their white riders
On the walls that held and counted the hours
The wind lasted

Two landbirds looked on and the north and the east
Looked on and the wind poured cups of foam
And the evening began

The old men in the shanties looked on and lit their
Pipes and the young men spoke of the girls
For a wild night like this

The south and the west looked on and the moon came
When the wind went down and the sea was sorry
And the singing slow

Ask how the sunset looked between the wind going
Down and the moon coming up and I would struggle
To tell the how of it

I give you fire here, I give you water, I give you
The wind that blew them across and across,
The scooping, mixing wind

PAULA

Nothing else in this song—only your face
Nothing else here—only your drinking, night-gray eyes

The pier runs into the lake straight as a rifle barrel
I stand on the pier and sing how I know you mornings
It is not your eyes, your face, I remember
It is not your dancing, race-horse feet
It is something else I remember you for on the pier mornings

Your hands are sweeter than nut-brown bread when you touch me
Your shoulder brushes my arm—a south-west wind crosses the pier
I forget your hands and your shoulder and I say again

Nothing else in this song—only your face
Nothing else here—only your drinking, night-gray eyes.

LAUGHING BLUE STEEL

Two fishes swimming in the sea,
Two birds flying in the air,
Two chisels on an anvil—maybe
Beaten, hammered, laughing blue steel to each other—maybe
Sure I would rather be a chisel with you
 than a fish
Sure I would rather be a chisel with you
 than a bird
Take these two chisel-pals, O God
Take 'em and beat 'em, hammer 'em,
 hear 'em laugh

THEY ASK EACH OTHER WHERE THEY CAME FROM

Am I the river your white birds fly over?
Are you the green valley my silver channels roam?
The two of us a bowl of blue sky day time

and a bowl of red stars night time?
Who picked you
out of the first great whirl of nothings
and threw you here?

HOW MUCH?

How much do you love me, a million bushels?
Oh, a lot more than that, Oh, a lot more

And tomorrow maybe only half a bushel?
Tomorrow maybe not even a half a bushel

And is this your heart arithmetic?
This is the way the wind measures the weather

THROWBACKS

SOMEWHERE you and I remember we came
Stairways from the sea and our heads dripping
Ladders of dust and mud and our hair snarled
Rags of drenching mist and our hands clawing, climbing
You and I that snickered in the crotches and corners,
 in the gab of our first talking
Red dabs of dawn summer mornings and the rain sliding off our shoulders
 summer afternoons
Was it you and I yelled songs and songs in the nights
 of big yellow moons?

WIND SONG

LONG ago I learned how to sleep,
In an old apple orchard where the wind swept by counting its money and
 throwing it away,
In a wind-gaunt orchard where the limbs forked out and listened or never
 listened at all,

In a passel of trees where the branches trapped the wind into whistling,
"Who, who are you?"
I slept with my head in an elbow on a summer afternoon and there I took
a sleep lesson
There I went away saying I know why they sleep, I know how they trap
the tricky winds
Long ago I learned how to listen to the singing wind and how to forget
and how to hear the deep whine,
Slapping and lapsing under the day blue and the night stars
Who, who are you?

Who can ever forget
listening to the wind go by
counting its money
and throwing it away?

THREE SPRING NOTATIONS ON BIPEDS

1

THE down drop of the blackbird,
The wing catch of arrested flight,
The stop midway and then off
off for triangles, circles, loops
of new hieroglyphs—
This is April's way a woman
"O yes, I'm here again and your heart
knows I was coming"

2

White pigeons rush at the sun,
A marathon of wing feats is on
"Who most loves danger? Who most loves
wings? Who somersaults for God's sake
in the name of wing power
in the sun and blue
on an April Thursday?"
So ten winged heads, ten winged feet,
race their white forms over Elmhurst

They go fast once the ten together were
a feather of foam bubble, a chrysanthemum
whirl speaking to silver and azure

3

The child is on my shoulders
In the prairie moonlight the child's legs
hang over my shoulders
She sits on my neck and I hear her calling
me a good horse
She slides down—and into the moon silver of
a prairie stream
She throws a stone and laughs at the clug-clug

SANDHILL PEOPLE

I took away three pictures
One was a white gull forming a half-mile arch from the pines toward Waukegan
One was a whistle in the little sandhills, a bird crying either to the sunset gone or the dusk come
One was three spotted waterbirds, zigzagging, cutting scrolls and jags, writing a bird Sanscrit of wing points, half over the sand, half over the water, a half-love for the sea, a half-love for the land

I took away three thoughts
One was a thing my people call "love," a shut-in river hunting the sea, breaking white falls between tall clefs of hill country
One was a thing my people call "silence," the wind running over the butter faced sand-flowers, running over the sea, and never heard of again
One was a thing my people call "death," neither a whistle in the little sandhills, nor a bird Sanscrit of wing points, yet a coat all the stars and seas have worn, yet a face the beach wears between sunset and dusk

FAR ROCKAWAY NIGHT TILL MORNING

WHAT can we say of the night?
The fog night, the moon night,
the fog moon night last night?

There swept out of the sea a song
There swept out of the sea—
torn white plungers
There came on the coast wind drive
In the spit of a driven spray,
On the boom of foam and rollers,
The cry of midnight to morning
Hoi-a-loa
Hoi-a-loa
Hoi-a-loa

Who has loved the night more than I have?
Who has loved the fog moon night last night
more than I have?

Out of the sea that song
—can I ever forget it?
Out of the sea those plungers
—can I remember anything else?
Out of the midnight morning cry Hoi-a-loa
—how can I hunt any other songs now?

HUMMINGBIRD WOMAN

WHY should I be wondering
How you would look in black velvet and yellow?
in orange and green?
I who cannot remember whether it was a dash of blue
Or a whirr of red under your willow throat—
Why do I wonder how you would look in hummingbird feathers?

BUCKWHEAT

1

THERE was a late autumn cricket,
And two smoldering mountain sunsets
Under the valley roads of her eyes

There was a late autumn cricket,
A hangover of summer song,
Scraping a tune
Of the late night clocks of summer,
In the late winter night fireglow,
This in a circle of black velvet at her neck

2

In pansy eyes a flash, a thin rim of white light, a beach bonfire ten miles
across dunes, a speck of a fool star in night's half circle of velvet

In the corner of the left arm a dimple, a mole, a forget-me-not, and it flut-
tered a hummingbird wing, a blur in the honey-red clover, in the
honey-white buckwheat

BLUE RIDGE

BORN a million years ago you stay here a million years watching the
 women come and live and be laid away you and they thin-gray
 thin-dusk lovely
So it goes either the early morning lights are lovely or the early morning
 star
I am glad I have seen racehorses, women, mountains

VALLEY SONG

THE sunset swept
To the valley's west, you remember

The frost was on
A star burnt blue
We were warm, you remember,
And counted the rings on a moon

The sunset swept
To the valley's west
And was gone in a big dark door of stars

MIST FORMS

THE sheets of night mist travel a long valley
I know why you came at sundown in a scarf mist

What was it we touched asking nothing and asking all?
How many times can death come and pay back what we saw?

In the oath of the sod, the lips that swore,
In the oath of night mist, nothing and all,
A riddle is here no man tells, no woman

PIGEON

THE flutter of blue pigeon's wings
Under a river bridge
Hunting a clean dry arch,
A corner for a sleep—
This flutters here in a woman's hand

A singing sleep cry,
A drunken poignant two lines of song,
Somebody looking clean into yesterday

And remembering, or looking clean into
Tomorrow, and reading,—
This sings here as a woman's sleep cry sings

Pigeon friend of mine,
Fly on, sing on

CHASERS

THE sea at its worst drives a white foam up,
The same sea sometimes so easy and rocking with green mirrors
So you were there when the white foam was up
And the salt spatter and the rack and the dulse—
You were done fingering these, and high, higher and higher
Your feet went and it was your voice went, "Hai, hai, hai,"
Up where the rocks let nothing live and the grass was gone,
Not even a hank nor a wisp of sea moss hoping
Here your feet and your same singing, "Hai, hai, hai "

Was there anything else to answer than, "Hai, hai, hai"?
Did I go up those same crags yesterday and the day before
Scuffling my shoe leather and scraping the tough gnomie stuff
Of stones woven on a cold criss-cross so long ago?
Have I not sat there watching the white foam up,
The hoarse white lines coming to curve, foam, slip back?
Didn't I learn then how the call comes, "Hai, hai, hai"?

HORSE FIDDLE

FIRST I would like to write for you a poem to be shouted in the teeth of
a strong wind
Next I would like to write one for you to sit on a hill and read down the
river valley on a late summer afternoon, reading it in less than a whisper to Jack on his soft wire legs learning to stand up and preach, Jack-in-the-pulpit
As many poems as I have written to the moon and the streaming of the
moon spinners of light, so many of the summer moon and the winter

moon I would like to shoot along to your ears for nothing, for a laugh,
a song,

for nothing at all,
for one look from you,
for your face turned away
and your voice in one clutch
half way between a tree-wind moan
and a night-bird sob

Believe nothing of it all, pay me nothing, open your window for the other
singers and keep it shut for me

The road I am on is a long road and I can go hungry again like I have gone
hungry before

What else have I done nearly all my life than go hungry and go on singing?

Leave me with the hoot owl
I have slept in a blanket listening
He learned it, he must have learned it
From two moons, the summer moon
And the winter moon
And the streaming of the moon spinners of light

TIMBER WINGS

THERE was a wild pigeon came often to Hinkley's timber
Gray wings that wrote their loops and triangles on the walnuts and the
hazel

There was a wild pigeon

There was a summer came year by year to Hinkley's timber.
Rainy months and sunny and pigeons calling and one pigeon best of all
who came

There was a summer

It is so long ago I saw this wild pigeon and listened
It is so long ago I heard the summer song of the pigeon who told me why
night comes, why death and stars come, why the whippoorwill remem-
bers three notes only and always.

It is so long ago, it is like now and today, the gray-wing pigeon's way of
telling it all, telling it to the walnuts and hazel, telling it to me
So there is memory
So there is a pigeon, a summer, a gray wing beating my shoulder

NIGHT STUFF

LISTEN a while, the moon is a lovely woman, a lonely woman, lost in a
silver dress, lost in a circus rider's silver dress

Listen a while, the lake by night is a lonely woman, a lovely woman, circled
with birches and pines mixing their green and white among stars shattered
in spray clear nights

I know the moon and the lake have twisted the roots under my heart the
same as a lonely woman, a lovely woman, in a silver dress, in a circus
rider's silver dress

SPANISH

FASTEN black eyes on me
I ask nothing of you under the peach trees,
Fasten your black eyes in my gray
with the spear of a storm
The air under the peach blossoms is a haze of pink

SHAG-BARK HICKORY

IN the moonlight under a shag-bark hickory tree
Watching the yellow shadows melt in hoof-pools,
Listening to the yes and the no of a woman's hands,
I kept my guess why the night was glad

The night was lit with a woman's eyes
The night was crossed with a woman's hands,
The night kept humming an undersong

THE SOUTH WIND SAYS SO

If the oriole calls like last year
when the south wind sings in the oats,
if the leaves climb and climb on a bean pole
saying over a song learnt from the south wind,
if the crickets send up the same old lessons
found when the south wind keeps on coming,
we will get by, we will keep on coming,
we will get by, we will come along,
we will fix our hearts over,
the south wind says so

Accomplished Facts

ACCOMPLISHED FACTS

EVERY year Emily Dickinson sent one friend
the first arbutus bud in her garden

In a last will and testament Andrew Jackson
remembered a friend with the gift of George
Washington's pocket spy-glass

Napoleon too, in a last testament, mentioned a silver
watch taken from the bedroom of Frederck the Great,
and passed along this trophy to a particular friend

O Henry took a blood carnation from his coat lapel
and handed it to a country girl starting work in a
bean bazaar, and scribbled "Peach blossoms may or
may not stay pink in city dust"

So it goes Some things we buy, some not
Tom Jefferson was proud of his radishes, and Abe
Lincoln blacked his own boots, and Bismarck called
Berlin a wilderness of brick and newspapers

So it goes There are accomplished facts
Ride, ride, ride on in the great new blimps—
Cross unheard-of oceans, circle the planet
When you come back we may sit by five hollyhocks
We might listen to boys fighting for marbles
The grasshopper will look good to us

So it goes .

GRIEG BEING DEAD

GRIEG being dead we may speak of him and his art
Grieg being dead we can talk about whether he was any good or not
Grieg being with Ibsen, Bjornson, Lief Encson and the rest,
Grieg being dead does not care a hell's hoot what we say

Morning, Spring, Anitra's Dance,
He dreams them at the doors of new stars.

CHORDS

IN the morning, a Sunday morning, shadows of sea and adumbrants of
rock in her eyes horseback in leather boots and leather gauntlets
by the sea

In the evening, a Sunday evening, a rope of pearls on her white shoulders
and a speaking, brooding black velvet, relapsing to the voiceless

battering Russian marches on a piano drive of blizzards
across Nebraska

Yes, riding horseback on hills by the sea sitting at the ivory keys in
black velvet, a rope of pearls on white shoulders

DOGHEADS

AMONG the grassroots
In the moonlight, who comes circling,
red tongues and high noses?
Is one of 'em Buck and one of 'em
White Fang?

In the moonlight, who are they, cross-legged,
telling their stories over and over?
Is one of 'em Martin Eden and one of 'em Larsen
the Wolf?

Let an epitaph read
He loved the straight eyes of dogs
and the strong heads of men

TRINITY PLACE

THE grave of Alexander Hamilton is in Trinity yard at the end of Wall
Street

The grave of Robert Fulton likewise is in Trinity yard where Wall Street
stops.

And in this yard stenogs, bundle boys, scrubwomen, sit on the tombstones,
and walk on the grass of graves, speaking of war and weather, of
babies, wages and love

An iron picket fence . and streaming thousands along Broadway
sidewalks straw hats, faces, legs a singing, talking, hustling
river down the great street that ends with a Sea

easy is the sleep of Alexander Hamilton
easy is the sleep of Robert Fulton
easy are the great governments and the great steamboats

PORTRAIT
(For S A)

To write one book in five years
or five books in one year,
to be the painter and the thing painted,
where are we, bo?

Wait—get his number
The barber shop handling is here
and the tweeds, the cheviot, the Scotch Mist,
and the flame orange scarf

Yet there is more—he sleeps under bridges
with lonely crazy men, he sits in country
jails with bootleggers, he adopts the children
of broken-down burlesque actresses, he has
cried a heart of tears for Windy MacPherson's
father, he pencils wrists of lonely women

Can a man sit at a desk in a skyscraper in Chicago
and be a harnessmaker in a corn town in Iowa
and feel the tall grass coming up in June
and the ache of the cottonwood trees
singing with the prairie wind?

POTOMAC RIVER MIST

ALL the policemen, saloonkeepers and efficiency experts in Toledo knew
Bern Dailey, secretary ten years when Whitlock was mayor.
Pickpockets, yeggs, three card men, he knew them all and how they flit
from zone to zone, birds of wind and weather, singers, fighters,
scavengers

The Washington monument pointed to a new moon for us and a gang
from over the river sang ragtime to a ukulele
The river mist marched up and down the Potomac, we hunted the fog-
swept Lincoln Memorial, white as a blonde woman's arm
We circled the city of Washington and came back home four o'clock in
the morning, passing a sign House Where Abraham Lincoln Died,
Admission 25 Cents

I got a letter from him in Sweden and I sent him a postcard from Norway
. every newspaper from America ran news of "the flu "

The path of a night fog swept up the river to the Lincoln Memorial when
I saw it again and alone at a winter's end, the marble in the mist
white as a blonde woman's arm

JACK LONDON AND O HENRY

BOTH were jailbirds, no speechmakers at all,
speaking best with one foot on a brass rail,
a beer glass in the left hand and the right
hand employed for gestures

And both were lights snuffed out no warning
no lingering
Who knew the hearts of these boozefighters?

HIS OWN FACE HIDDEN

HOKUSAI's portrait of himself
Tells what his hat was like
And his arms and legs The only faces
Are a river and a mountain
And two laughing farmers

The smile of Hokusai
is under his hat

CUPS OF COFFEE

THE haggard woman with a hacking cough and a deathless love whispers
of white flowers in your poem you pour like a cup of coffee,
Gabriel

The slim girl whose voice was lost in the waves of flesh piled on her
bones and the woman who sold to many men and saw her
breasts shrivel in two poems you pour these like a cup of coffee,
Francois

The woman whose lips are a thread of scarlet, the woman whose feet take
hold on hell, the woman who turned to a memorial of salt looking
at the lights of a forgotten city in your affidavits, ancient Jews,
you pour these like cups of coffee

The woman who took men as snakes take rabbits, a rag and a bone and
a hank of hair, she whose eyes called men to sea dreams and shark's
teeth in a poem you pour this like a cup of coffee, Kip

Marching to the footlights in night robes with spots of blood, marching
in white sheets muffling the faces, marching with heads in the air
they come back and cough and cry and sneer in your poems,
men, you pour these like cups of coffee

Passports

SMOKE ROSE GOLD

THE dome of the capitol looks to the Potomac river
 Out of haze over the sunset,
 Out of a smoke rose gold
 One star shines over the sunset
 Night takes the dome and the river, the sun and the smoke rose gold,
 The haze changes from sunset to star
 The pour of a thin silver struggles against the dark
 A star might call It's a long way across

TANGIBLES

I HAVE seen this city in the day and the sun
 I have seen this city in the night and the moon
 And in the night and the moon I have seen a thing this city gave me
 nothing of in the day and the sun

The float of the dome in the day and the sun is one thing
 The float of the dome in the night and the moon is another thing
 In the night and the moon the float of the dome is a dream-whisper, a
 croon of a hope "Not today, child, not today, lover, maybe tomorrow,
 child, maybe tomorrow, lover."

Can a dome of iron dream deeper than living men?
 Can the float of a shape hovering among tree-tops—can this speak an
 oratory sad, singing and red beyond the speech of the living men?

A mother of men, a sister, a lover, a woman past the dreams of the living—
 Does she go sad, singing and red out of the float of this dome?

There is something . here . men die for.

[WASHINGTON, August, 1918]

NIGHT MOVEMENT—NEW YORK

In the night, when the sea-winds take the city in their arms,
And cool the loud streets that kept their dust noon and afternoon,
In the night, when the sea-birds call to the lights of the city,
The lights that cut on the skyline their name of a city,
In the night, when the trains and wagons start from a long way off
For the city where the people ask bread and want letters,
In the night the city lives too—the day is not all
In the night there are dancers dancing and singers singing,
And the sailors and soldiers look for numbers on doors
In the night the sea-winds take the city in their arms

NORTH ATLANTIC

WHEN the sea is everywhere
from horizon to horizon
 when the salt and blue
 fill a circle of horizons
I swear again how I know
the sea is older than anything else
and the sea younger than anything else

My first father was a landsman
My tenth father was a sea-lover,
 a gypsy sea-boy, a singer of chanties
 (Oh Blow the Man Down!)

The sea is always the same
and yet the sea always changes

The sea gives all,
and yet the sea keeps something back

The sea takes without asking.
The sea is a worker, a thief and a loafer
 Why does the sea let go so slow?
 Or never let go at all?

The sea always the same
 day after day,
 the sea always the same
 night after night,
 fog on fog and never a star,
 wind on wind and running white sheets,
 bird on bird always a sea-bird—
 so the days get lost
 it is neither Saturday nor Monday,
 it is any day or no day,
 it is a year, ten years

Fog on fog and never a star,
 what is a man, a child, a woman,
 to the green and grinding sea?
 The ropes and boards squeak and groan

On the land they know a child they have named Today
 On the sea they know three children they have named
 Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

I made a song to a woman —it ran
 I have wanted you
 I have called to you
 on a day I counted a thousand years

In the deep of a sea-blue noon
 many women run in a man's head,
 phantom women leaping from a man's forehead
 to the railings into the sea to the
 sea rim
 a man's mother . . . a man's wife other
 women

I asked a sure-footed sailor how and he said.
 I have known many women but there is only one sea

I saw the North Star once
 and our old friend, The Big Dipper,
 only the sea between us

"Take away the sea
and I lift The Dipper,
swing the handle of it,
drink from the brim of it"

I saw the North Star one night
and five new stars for me in the ngging ropes,
and seven old stars in the cross of the wireless
 plunging by night,
 plowing by night—
Five new cool stars, seven old warm stars

I have been let down in a thousand graves
 by my kinfolk
I have been left alone with the sea and the sea's
 wife, the wind, for my last friends
And my kinfolk never knew anything about it at all

Salt from an old work of eating our graveclothes is here
 The sea-kin of my thousand graves,
 The sea and the sea's wife, the wind,
They are all here tonight
 between the circle of horizons,
 between the cross of the wireless
 and the seven old warm stars
Out of a thousand sea-holes I came yesterday
Out of a thousand sea-holes I come tomorrow

I am kin of the changer
 I am a son of the sea
 and the sea's wife, the wind

FOG PORTRAIT

RINGS of iron gray smoke, a woman's steel face . . . looking . . . looking
Funnels of an ocean liner negotiating a fog night, pounng a taffy mass
 down the wind, layers of soot on the top deck, a taffrail . . . and a
 woman's steel face . . . looking . . . looking

Cliffs challenge humped, sudden arcs form on a gull's wing in the storm's
 vortex, miles of white horses plow through a stony beach, stars, clear
 sky, and everywhere free climbers calling, and a woman's steel face
 looking looking

FLYING FISH

I HAVE lived in many half-worlds myself and so I know you

I leaned at a deck rail watching a monotonous sea, the same circling birds
 and the same plunge of furrows carved by the plowing keel

I leaned so and you fluttered struggling between two waves in the
 air now and then under the water and out again a fish
 a bird a fin thing a wing thing

Child of water, child of air, fin thing and wing thing . I have lived in
 many half-worlds myself and so I know you

HOME THOUGHTS

THE sea rocks have a green moss.
 The pine rocks have red berries
 I have memories of you

Speak to me of how you miss me
 Tell me the hours go long and slow

Speak to me of the drag on your heart,
 The iron drag of the long days

I know hours empty as a beggar's tin cup on a rainy day, empty as a sol-
 dier's sleeve with an arm lost

Speak to me . .

IN THE SHADOW OF THE PALACE

LET us go out of the fog, John, out of the filmy persistent drizzle on the streets of Stockholm, let us put down the collars of our raincoats, take off our hats and sit in the newspaper office

Let us sit among the telegrams—clickety-click—the kaiser's crown goes into the gutter and the Hohenzollern throne of a thousand years falls to pieces a one-hoss shay

It is a fog night out and the umbrellas are up and the collars of the raincoats—and all the steamboats up and down the Baltic sea have their lights out and the wheelmen sober

Here the telegrams come—one king goes and another—butter is costly there is no butter to buy for our bread in Stockholm—and a little patty of butter costs more than all the crowns of Germany.

Let us go out in the fog, John, let us roll up our raincoat collars and go on the streets where men are sneering at the kings

TWO ITEMS

STRONG rocks hold up the riksdag bridge . always strong river waters shoving their shoulders against them

In the riksdag tonight three hundred men are talking to each other about more potatoes and bread for the Swedish people to eat this winter.

In a boat among calm waters next to the running waters a fisherman sits in the dark and I, leaning at a parapet, see him lift a net and let it down he waits the waters run . the riksdag talks he lifts the net and lets it down

Stars lost in the sky ten days of drizzle spread over the sky saying yes-yes

.

Every afternoon at four o'clock fifteen apple women who have sold their apples in Christiania meet at a coffee house and gab

Every morning at nine o'clock a girl wipes the windows of a hotel across the street from the post office in Stockholm

I have pledged them when I go to California next summer and see the
orange groves splattered with yellow balls
I shall remember other people half way round the world

STREETS TOO OLD

I WALKED among the streets of an old city and the streets were lean as the
throats of hard seafish soaked in salt and kept in barrels many years
How old, how old, how old, we are —the walls went on saying, street walls
leaning toward each other like old women of the people, like old mid-
wives tired and only doing what must be done
The greatest the city could offer me, a stranger, was statues of the kings,
on all corners bronzes of kings—ancient bearded kings who wrote
books and spoke of God's love for all people—and young kings who
took forth armies out across the frontiers splitting the heads of their
opponents and enlarging their kingdoms
Strangest of all to me, a stranger in this old city, was the murmur always
whistling on the winds twisting out of the armpits and fingertips of
the kings in bronze —Is there no loosening? Is this for always?
In an early snowflurry one cried —Pull me down where the tired old mid-
wives no longer look at me, throw the bronze of me to a fierce fire
and make me into neckchains for dancing children

SAVOIR FAIRE

CAST a bronze of my head and legs and put them on the king's street
Set the cast of me here alongside Carl XII, making two Carls for the
Swedish people and the utlanders to look at between the palace and
the Grand Hotel
The summer sun will shine on both the Carls, and November drizzles
wrap the two, one in tall leather boots, one in wool leggings
Also I place it in the record the Swedish people may name boats after
me or change the name of a long street and give it one of my nick-
names.
The old men who beset the soil of Sweden and own the titles to the land
—the old men who enjoy a silken shimmer to their chin whiskers
when they promenade the streets named after old kings—if they for-

get me—the old men whose varicose veins stand more and more blue on the calves of their legs when they take their morning baths attended by old women born to the bath service of old men and young—if these old men say another King Carl should have a bronze on the king's street rather than a Fool Carl—

Then I would hurl them only another fool's laugh—

I would remember last Sunday when I stood on a jutland of fire-born red granite watching the drop of the sun in the middle of the afternoon and the full moon shining over Stockholm four o'clock in the afternoon

If the young men will read five lines of one of my poems I will let the kings have all the bronze—I ask only that one page of my writings be a knapsack keepsake of the young men who are the bloodkin of those who laughed nine hundred years ago We are afraid of nothing—only—the sky may fall on us

MOHAMMED BEK HADJETLACHE

THIS Mohammedan colonel from the Caucasus yells with his voice and wigwags with his arms

The interpreter translates, "I was a friend of Kornilov, he asks me what to do and I tell him"

A stub of a man, this Mohammedan colonel a projectile shape
a bald head hammered

"Does he fight or do they put him in a cannon and shoot him at the enemy?"

This fly-by-night, this bull-roarer who knows everybody

"I write forty books, history of Islam, history of Europe, true religion, scientific farming, I am the Roosevelt of the Caucasus, I go to America and ride horses in the moving pictures for \$500,000, you get \$50,000 "

"I have 30,000 acres in the Caucasus, I have a stove factory in Petrograd the bolsheviks take from me, I am an old friend of the Czar, I am an old family friend of Clemenceau . . ."

These hands strangled three fellow workers for the czarist restoration, took their money, sent them in sacks to a river bottom . . . and scandalized Stockholm with his gang of strangler women

Mid-sea strangler hands rise before me illustrating a wish, "I ride horses

for the moving pictures in America, \$500,000, and you get ten per cent "

This rider of fugitive dawns

HIGH CONSPIRATORIAL PERSONS

OUT of the testimony of such reluctant lips, out of the oaths and mouths
of such scrupulous liars, out of perjurers whose hands swore by God
to the white sun before all men,

Out of a rag saturated with smears and smuts gathered from the footbaths
of kings and the loin cloths of whores, from the scabs of Babylon and
Jerusalem to the scabs of London and New York,

From such a rag that has wiped the secret sores of kings and overlords
across the millenniums of human marches and babblings,

From such a rag perhaps I shall wring one reluctant desperate drop of
blood, one honest-to-God spot of red speaking a mother-heart

[CHRISTIANIA, NORWAY, *December, 1918*]

BALTIC FOG NOTES

SEVEN days all fog, all mist, and the turbines pounding through high seas
I was a plaything, a rat's neck in the teeth of a scuffling mastiff
Fog and fog and no stars, sun, moon

Then an afternoon in fjords, low-lying lands scrawled in granite languages
on a gray sky,

A night harbor, blue dusk mountain shoulders against a night sky,
And a circle of lights blinking Ninety thousand people here

Among the Wednesday night thousands in galoshes and coats
slickered for rain,

I learned how hungry I was for streets and people

. .

I would rather be water than anything else.

I saw a drive of salt fog and mist in the North Atlantic and an iceberg
dusky as a cloud in the gray of morning

And I saw the dream pools of fjords in Norway . . and the scarf of
dancing water on the rocks and over the edges of mountain shelves

Bury me in a mountain graveyard in Norway.
Three tongues of water sing around it with snow from the mountains

Bury me in the North Atlantic
A fog there from Iceland will be a murmur in gray over me and a long
deep wind sob always

Bury me in an Illinois cornfield
The blizzards loosen their pipe organ voluntaries in winter stubble and
the spring rains and the fall rains bring letters from the sea

[BERGEN]

Circles of Doors

CIRCLES OF DOORS

I LOVE him, I love him, ran the patter of her lips
And she formed his name on her tongue and sang
And she sent him word she loved him so much,
So much, and death was nothing, work, art, home,
All was nothing if her love for him was not first
Of all, the patter of her lips ran, I love him,
I love him, and he knew the doors that opened
Into doors and more doors, no end of doors,
And full-length mirrors doubling and tripling
The apparitions of doors circling corridors of
Looking-glasses and doors, some with knobs, some

With no knobs, some opening slow to a heavy push,
 And some jumping open at a touch and a hello
 And he knew if he so wished he could follow her
 Swift running through circles of doors, hearing
 Sometimes her whisper, I love him, I love him,
 And sometimes only a high chaser of laughter
 Somewhere five or ten doors ahead or five or ten
 Doors behind, or chattering *h-st, h-st*, among corners
 Of the tall full-length dusty looking-glasses.
 I love, I love, I love, she sang short and quick in
 High thin beaten soprano and he knew the meanings,
 The high chaser of laughter, the doors on doors
 And the looking-glasses, the room to room hunt,
 The ends opening into new ends always

HATE

ONE man killed another The saying between them had been "I'd give you
 the shirt off my back"

The killer wept over the dead The dead if he looks back knows the killer
 was sorry It was a shot in one second of hate out of ten years of love

Why is the sun a red ball in the six o'clock mist?

Why is the moon a tumbling chimney? tumbling tumbling
 "I'd give you the shirt off my back" And I'll kill you if my
 head goes wrong

TWO STRANGERS BREAKFAST

THE law says you and I belong to each other, George
 The law says you are mine and I am yours, George
 And there are a million miles of white snowstorms, a million furnaces of
 hell,
 Between the chair where you sit and the chair where I sit
 The law says two strangers shall eat breakfast together after nights on the
 horn of an Arctic moon

SNOW

Snow took us away from the smoke valleys into white mountains, we saw
velvet blue cows eating a vermilion grass and they gave us a pink
milk

Snow changes our bones into fog streamers caught by the wind and spelled
into many dances

Six bits for a sniff of snow in the old days bought us bubbles beautiful to
forget floating long-arm women across sunny autumn hills

Our bones cry and cry, no let-up, cry their telegrams
More, more—a yen is on, a long yen and God only knows when it will
end

In the old days six bits got us snow and stopped the yen—now the govern-
ment says No, no, when our bones cry their telegrams More, more

The blue cows are dying, no more pink milk, no more floating long-arm
women, the hills are empty—us for the smoke valleys—sneeze and
shiver and croak, you dopes—the government says No, no

DANCER

THE lady in red, she in the chile con carne red,
Brilliant as the shine of a pepper crimson in the summer sun,
She behind a false-face, the much sought-after dancer, the most sought-
after dancer of all in this masquerade,
The lady in red sox and red hat, ankles of willow, crimson arrow amidst
the Spanish clashes of music,

I sit in a corner
watching her dance first with one man
and then another.

PLASTER

"I KNEW a real man once," says Agatha in the splendor of a shagbark
hickory tree

Did a man touch his lips to Agatha? Did a man hold her in his arms? Did
a man only look at her and pass by?

Agatha, far past forty in a splendor of remembrance, says, "I knew a real
man once"

CURSE OF A RICH POLISH PEASANT ON HIS SISTER WHO
RAN AWAY WITH A WILD MAN

FELIXSOWA has gone again from our house and this time for good, I hope
She and her husband took with them the cow father gave them, and they
sold it

She went like a swine, because she called neither on me, her brother, nor
on her father, before leaving for those forests

That is where she ought to live, with bears, not with men

She was something of an ape before and there, with her wild husband, she
became altogether an ape

No honest person would have done as they did

Whose fault is it? And how much they have cursed me and their father!
May God not punish them for it They think only about money, they let
the church go if they can only live fat on their money

WOMAN WITH A PAST

THERE was a woman tore off a red velvet gown
And slashed the white skin of her right shoulder
And a crimson zigzag wrote a finger nail hurry

There was a woman spoke six short words
And quit a life that was old to her
For a life that was new.

There was a woman swore an oath
And gave hoarse whisper to a prayer
And it was all over

She was a thief and a whore and a kept woman,
She was a thing to be used and played with
She wore an ancient scarlet sash

The story is thin and wavering,
White as a face in the first apple blossoms,
White as a birch in the snow of a winter moon

The story is never told
There are white lips whisper alone.
There are red lips whisper alone

In the cool of the old walls,
In the white of the old walls,
The red song is over

WHITE HANDS

For the second time in a year this lady with the white hands is brought
to the west room second floor of a famous sanatorium
Her husband is a cornice manufacturer in an Iowa town and the lady has
often read papers on Victorian poets before the local literary club
Yesterday she washed her hands forty-seven times during her waking
hours and in her sleep moaned restlessly attempting to clean imaginary
soiled spots off her hands
Now the head physician touches his chin with a crooked forefinger

AN ELECTRIC SIGN GOES DARK

POLAND, France, Judea ran in her veins,
Singing to Paris for bread, singing to Gotham in a fizz at the pop of a
bottle's cork

"Won't you come and play wiz me" she sang . and "I just can't make
my eyes behave"
"Higgeldy-Piggeldy," "Papa's Wife," "Follow Me" were plays

Did she wash her feet in a tub of milk? Was a strand of pearls sneaked
from her trunk? The newspapers asked
Cigarettes, tulips, pacing horses, took her name

Twenty years old thirty forty .
Forty-five and the doctors fathom nothing, the doctors quarrel, the doc-
tors use silver tubes feeding twenty-four quarts of blood into the veins,
the respects of a prize-fighter, a cab driver
And a little mouth moans It is easy to die when they are dying so many
grand deaths in France

A voice, a shape, gone
A baby bundle from Warsaw legs, torso, head on a hotel bed
at The Savoy
The white chiselings of flesh that flung themselves in somersaults, strad-
dles, for packed houses
A memory, a stage and footlights out, an electric sign on Broadway dark

She belonged to somebody, nobody
No one man owned her, no ten nor a thousand
She belonged to many thousand men, lovers of the white chiseling of
arms and shoulders, the ivory of a laugh, the bells of song

Railroad brakemen taking trains across Nebraska prairies, lumbermen
jaunting in pine and tamarack of the Northwest, stock ranchers in
the middle west, mayors of southern cities
Say to their pals and wives now I see by the papers Anna Held is dead

THEY BUY WITH AN EYE TO LOOKS

THE fine cloth of your love might be a fabric of Egypt,
Something Sinbad, the sailor, took away from robbers,
Something a traveler with plenty of money might pick up
And bring home and stick on the walls and say
"There's a little thing made a hit with me

When I was in Cairo—I think I must see Cairo again some day”
So there are cornice manufacturers, chewing-gum kings,
Young Napoleons who corner eggs or corner cheese,
Phenoms looking for more worlds to corner,
And still other phenoms who lard themselves in
And make a killing in steel, copper, permanganese,
And they say to random friends in for a call
“Have you had a look at my wife? Here she is
Haven’t I got her dolled up for fair?”
O-ee! the fine cloth of your love might be a fabric of Egypt.

PROUD AND BEAUTIFUL

AFTER you have spent all the money modistes and manicures and man-
nikins will take for fixing you over into a thing the people on the
streets call proud and beautiful,
After the shops and fingers have worn out all they have and know and
can hope to have and know for the sake of making you what the
people on the streets call proud and beautiful,
After there is absolutely nothing more to be done for the sake of staging
you as a great enigmatic bird of paradise and they must all declare
you to be proud and beautiful,
After you have become the last word in good looks, in so far as good looks
may be fixed and formulated, then, why then, there is nothing more
to it then, it is then you listen and see how voices and eyes declare
you to be proud and beautiful

TELEGRAM

I saw a telegram handed a two hundred pound man at a desk And the
little scrap of paper charged the air like a set of crystals in a chemist’s
tube to a whispering pinch of salt
Cross my heart, the two hundred pound man had just cracked a joke
about a new hat he got his wife, when the messenger boy slipped in
and asked him to sign He gave the boy a nickel, tore the envelope
and read
Then he yelled “Good God,” jumped for his hat and raincoat, ran for the
elevator and took a taxi to a railroad depot

As I say, it was like a set of crystals in a chemist's tube and a whispering
pinch of salt
I wonder what Diogenes who lived in a tub in the sun would have com-
mented on the affair
I know a shoemaker who works in a cellar slamming half-soles onto
shoes, and when I told him, he said. "I pay my bills, I love my wife,
and I am not afraid of anybody."

GLIMMER

LET down your braids of hair, lady
Cross your legs and sit before the looking-glass
And gaze long on lines under your eyes
Life writes, men dance
And you know how men pay women

WHITE ASH

THERE is a woman on Michigan Boulevard keeps a parrot and goldfish
and two white mice

She used to keep a houseful of girls in kimonos and three pushbuttons
on the front door

Now she is alone with a parrot and goldfish and two white mice
but these are some of her thoughts

The love of a soldier on furlough or a sailor on shore leave burns with
a bonfire red and saffron

The love of an emigrant workman whose wife is a thousand miles away
burns with a blue smoke

The love of a young man whose sweetheart married an older man for
money burns with a sputtering uncertain flame.

And there is a love . . . one in a thousand . . . burns clean and is gone
leaving a white ash

And this is a thought she never explains to the parrot and goldfish and
two white mice.

TESTIMONY REGARDING A GHOST

THE roses slanted crimson sobs
On the night-sky hair of the women,
And the long light-fingered men
Spoke to the dark-haired women,
"Nothing lovelier, nothing lovelier"
How could he sit there among us all
Guzzling blood into his guts,
Goblets, mugs, buckets—
Leaning, toppling, laughing
With a slobber on his mouth,
A smear of red on his strong raw lips,
How could he sit there
And only two or three of us see him?
There was nothing to it
He wasn't there at all, of course

The roses leaned from the pots
The sprays shot roses gold and red
And the roses slanted crimson sobs
In the night-sky hair
And the voices chattered on the way
To the frappé, speaking of pictures,
Speaking of a strip of black velvet
Crossing a girlish woman's throat,
Speaking of the mystic music flash
Of pots and sprays of roses,
"Nothing lovelier, nothing lovelier."

PUT OFF THE WEDDING FIVE TIMES AND NOBODY
COMES TO IT

(Handbook for Quarreling Lovers)

I THOUGHT of offering you apothegms.
I might have said, "Dogs bark and the wind carries it away"
I might have said, "He who would make a door of gold must knock a
nail in every day"

So easy, so easy it would have been to inaugurate a high impetuous moment for you to look on before the final farewells were spoken
 You who assumed the farewells in the manner of people buying newspapers and reading the headlines—and all peddlers of gossip who buttonhole each other and wag their heads saying, “Yes, I heard all about it last Wednesday”

I considered several apothegms

“There is no love but service,” of course, would only initiate a quarrel over who has served and how and when

“Love stands against fire and flood and much bitterness,” would only initiate a second misunderstanding, and bickerings with lapses of silence

What is there in the Bible to cover our case, or Shakespeare? What poetry can help? Is there any left but Epictetus?

Since you have already chosen to interpret silence for language and silence for despair and silence for contempt and silence for all things but love,

Since you have already chosen to read ashes where God knows there was something else than ashes,

Since silence and ashes are two identical findings for your eyes and there are no apothegms worth handing out like a hung jury’s verdict for a record in our own hearts as well as the community at large,

I can only remember a Russian peasant who told me his grandfather warned him If you ride too good a horse you will not take the straight road to town

It will always come back to me in the blur of that hokku The heart of a woman of thirty is like the red ball of the sun seen through a mist.
 Or I will remember the witchery in the eyes of a girl at a barn dance one winter night in Illinois saying

Put off the wedding five times and nobody comes to it

BABY VAMPS

BABY vamps, is it harder work than it used to be?

Are the new soda parlors worse than the old time saloons?

Baby vamps, do you have jobs in the day time

or is this all you do?

do you come out only at night?

In the winter at the skating rinks, in the summer at the roller coaster parks,

Wherever figure eights are carved, by skates in winter, by roller coasters in summer,

Wherever the whirligigs are going and chicken spanish and hot dog are sold,

There you come, giggling baby vamp, there you come with your blue baby eyes, saying

Take me along

VAUDEVILLE DANCER

ELSIE FLIMMERWON, you got a job now with a jazz outfit in vaudeville

The houses go wild when you finish the act shimmying a fast shimmy to The Livery Stable Blues

It is long ago, Elsie Flimmerwon, I saw your mother over a washtub in a grape arbor when your father came with the locomotor ataxia shuffle

It is long ago, Elsie, and now they spell your name with an electric sign

Then you were a little thing in checked gingham and your mother wiped your nose and said You little fool, keep off the streets

Now you are a big girl at last and streetfuls of people read your name and a line of people shaped like a letter S stand at the box office hoping to see you shimmy.

BALLOON FACES

THE balloons hang on wires in the Mangold Gardens

They spot their yellow and gold, they juggle their blue and red, they float their faces on the face of the sky

Balloon-face eaters sit by hundreds reading the eat cards, asking, "What

shall we eat?"—and the waiters, "Have you ordered?" they are sixty
balloon faces sifting white over the tuxedos
Poets, lawyers, ad men, mason contractors, smart-alecks discussing "edu-
cated jackasses," here they put crabs into their balloon faces
Here sit the heavy balloon-face women lifting crimson lobsters into their
crimson faces, lobsters out of Sargossa sea-bottoms
Here sits a man cross-examining a woman, "Where were you last night?
What do you do with all your money? Who's buying your shoes now,
anyhow?"
So they sit eating whitefish, two balloon faces swept on God's night wind
And all the time the balloon spots on the wires, a little mile of festoons,
they play their own silence play of film yellow and film gold, bubble
blue and bubble red
The wind crosses the town, the wind from the west side comes to the
banks of marigolds boxed in the Marigold Gardens
Night moths fly and fix their feet in the leaves and eat and are seen by
the eaters
The jazz outfit sweats and the drums and the saxophones reach for the
ears of the eaters
The chorus brought from Broadway works at the fun and the slouch of
their shoulders, the kick of their ankles, reach for the eyes of the
eaters
These girls from Kokomo and Peoria, these hungry girls, since they are
paid-for, let us look on and listen, let us get their number

Why do I go again to the balloons on the wires, something for nothing,
kin women of the half-moon, dream women?
And the half-moon swinging on the wind crossing the town—these two,
the half-moon and the wind—this will be about all, this will be
about all

Eaters, go to it, your mazuma pays for it all, it's a knockout, a classy
knockout—and payday always comes
The moths in the marigolds will do for me, the half-moon, the wishing
wind and the little mile of balloon spots on wires—this will be about
all, this will be about all

Haze

HAZE

KEEP a red heart of memories
 Under the great gray rain sheds of the sky,
 Under the open sun and the yellow gloaming embers
 Remember all paydays of lilacs and songbirds,
 All starlights of cool memories on storm paths

Out of this prairie rise the faces of dead men
 They speak to me I can not tell you what they say

Other faces rise on the prairie
 They are the unborn The future

Yesterday and tomorrow cross and mix on the skyline
 The two are lost in a purple haze One forgets One waits

In the yellow dust of sunsets, in the meadows of vermillion eight o'clock
 June nights the dead men and the unborn children speak to
 me I can not tell you what they say you listen and you
 know

I don't care who you are, man
 I know a woman is looking for you
 and her soul is a corn-tassel kissing a south-west wind.

(The farm-boy whose face is the color of brick-dust, is calling the cows,
 he will form the letter X with crossed streams of milk from the teats,
 he will beat a tattoo on the bottom of a tin pail with X's of milk)

I don't care who you are, man
 I know sons and daughters looking for you

And they are gray dust working toward star paths
And you see them from a garret window when you laugh
At your luck and murmur, "I don't care"

I don't care who you are, woman
I know a man is looking for you
And his soul is a south-west wind kissing a corn-tassel

(The kitchen girl on the farm is throwing oats to the chickens and the
buff of their feathers says hello to the sunset's late maroon)

I don't care who you are, woman
I know sons and daughters looking for you
And they are next year's wheat or the year after hidden in the dark and
loam

My love is a yellow hammer spinning circles in Ohio, Indiana My love
is a redbird shooting flights in straight lines in Kentucky and Ten-
nessee My love is an early robin flaming an ember of copper on her
shoulders in March and April My love is a graybird living in the
eaves of a Michigan house all winter Why is my love always a cry-
ing thing of wings?

On the Indiana dunes, in the Mississippi marshes, I have asked Is it only
a fishbone on the beach?
Is it only a dog's jaw or a horse's skull whitening in the sun? Is the red
heart of man only ashes? Is the flame of it all a white light switched
off and the power-house wires cut?

Why do the prairie roses answer every summer? Why do the changing
repeating rains come back out of the salt sea wind-blown? Why do
the stars keep their tracks? Why do the cradles of the sky rock new
babies?

CADENZA

THE knees
of this proud woman
are bone

The elbows
 of this proud woman
 are bone

The summer-white stars
 and the winter-white stars
 never stop circling
 around this proud woman

The bones
 of this proud woman
 answer the vibrations
 of the stars

In summer
 the stars speak deep thoughts
 In the winter
 the stars repeat summer speeches.

The knees
 of this proud woman
 know these thoughts
 and know these speeches
 of the summer and winter stars

MEMORANDA

THIS handful of grass, brown, says little This quarter-mile field of it,
 waving seeds ripening in the sun, is a lake of luminous firefly
 lavender

Prairie roses, two of them, climb down the sides of a road ditch In the
 clear pool they find their faces along stiff knives of grass, and cat-tails
 who speak and keep thoughts in beaver brown

.

These gardens empty, these fields only flower ghosts, these yards with
 faces gone, leaves speaking as feet and skirts in slow dances to slow
 winds, I turn my head and say good-by to no one who hears, I pro-
 nounce a useless good-by.

POTOMAC TOWN IN FEBRUARY

THE bridge says Come across, try me, see how good I am
The big rock in the river says Look at me, learn how to stand up
The white water says I go on, around, under, over, I go on
A kneeling, scraggly pine says I am here yet, they nearly got me last year
A sliver of moon slides by on a high wind calling I know why, I'll see
you tomorrow, I'll tell you everything tomorrow

BUFFALO DUSK

THE buffaloes are gone
And those who saw the buffaloes are gone
Those who saw the buffaloes by thousands and how they pawed the
prairie sod into dust with their hoofs, their great heads down pawing
on in a great pageant of dusk,
Those who saw the buffaloes are gone
And the buffaloes are gone

CORN HUT TALK

WRITE your wishes
on the door
and come in

Stand outside
in the pools of the harvest moon

Bring in
the handshake of the pumpkins

There's a wish
for every hazel nut?
There's a hope
for every corn shock?
There's a kiss
for every clumsy climbing shadow?

Clover and the bumblebees once,
high winds and November rain now

Buy shoes
for rough weather in November
Buy shirts
to sleep outdoors when May comes

Buy me
something useless to remember you by
Send me
a sumach leaf from an Illinois hill

In the faces marching in the firelog flickers,
In the fire music of wood singing to winter,
Make my face march through the purple and ashes
Make me one of the fire singers to winter

BRANCHES

THE dancing girls here after a long night of it .
The long beautiful night of the wind and rain in April,
The long night hanging down from the drooping branches of the top of
a birch tree,
Swinging, swaying, to the wind for a partner, to the rain for a partner
What is the humming, swishing thing they sing in the morning now?
The rain, the wind, the swishing whispers of the long slim curve so little
and so dark on the western morning sky these dancing girls
here on an April early morning
They have had a long cool beautiful night of it with their partners learn-
ing this year's song of April

RUSTY CRIMSON (Christmas Day, 1917)

THE five o'clock prairie sunset is a strong man going to sleep after a long
day in a cornfield
The red dust of a rusty crimson is fixed with two fingers of lavender
A hook of smoke, a woman's nose in charcoal and nothing

The timberline turns in a cover of purple. A grain elevator humps a
 shoulder One steel star whisks out a pointed fire Moonlight comes
 on the stubble

"Jesus in an Illinois barn early this morning, the baby Jesus in
 flannels "

LETTER S

THE river is gold under a sunset of Illinois
 It is a molten gold someone pours and changes
 A woman mixing a wedding cake of butter and eggs
 Knows what the sunset is pouring on the river here.
 The river twists in a letter S
 A gold S now speaks to the Illinois sky

WEEDS

FROM the time of the early radishes
 To the time of the standing corn
 Sleepy Henry Hackerman hoes

There are laws in the village against weeds
 The law says a weed is wrong and shall be killed
 The weeds say life is a white and lovely thing
 And the weeds come on and on in irrepressible regiments
 Sleepy Henry Hackerman hoes, and the village law uttering a ban on
 weeds is unchangeable law

NEW FARM TRACTOR

SNUB nose, the guts of twenty mules are in your cylinders and transmission

The rear axles hold the kick of twenty Missouri jackasses

It is in the records of the patent office and the ads there is twenty horse-
 power pull here

The farm boy says hello to you instead of twenty mules—he sings to you
instead of ten span of mules

A bucket of oil and a can of grease is your hay and oats

Rain proof and fool proof they stable you anywhere in the fields with the
stars for a roof

I carve a team of long ear mules on the steering wheel—it's good-by now
to leather reins and the songs of the old mule skimmers

PODS

PEA pods cling to stems
Neponset, the village,
Clings to the Burlington railway main line
Terrible midnight limiteds roar through
Hauling sleepers to the Rockies and Sierras
The earth is slightly shaken
And Neponset trembles slightly in its sleep

HARVEST SUNSET

RED gold of pools,
Sunset furrows six o'clock,
And the farmer done in the fields
And the cows in the barns with bulging udders.

Take the cows and the farmer,
Take the barns and bulging udders
Leave the red gold of pools
And sunset furrows six o'clock
The farmer's wife is singing
The farmer's boy is whistling
I wash my hands in red gold of pools

NIGHT'S NOTHINGS AGAIN

Who knows what I know
when I have asked the night questions
and the night has answered nothing
only the old answers?

Who picked a crimson cryptogram,
the tail light of a motor car turning a corner,
or the midnight sign of a chile con carne place,
or a man out of the ashes of false dawn muttering "hot-dog" to the night
watchmen
Is there a spieler who has spoken the word or taken the number of night's
nothings? am I the spieler? or you?

Is there a tired head
the night has not fed and rested
and kept on its neck and shoulders?

Is there a wish
Of man to woman
and woman to man
the night has not written
and signed its name under?

Does the night forget
as a woman forgets?
and remember
as a woman remembers?

Who gave the night
this head of hair,
this gypsy head
calling Come-on?

Who gave the night anything at all
and asked the night questions
and was laughed at?

Who asked the night
for a long soft kiss
and lost the half-way lips?
who picked a red lamp in a mist?

Who saw the night
fold its Mona Lisa hands
and sit half-smiling, half-sad,
nothing at all,
and everything,
all the world?

Who saw the night
let down its hair
and shake its bare shoulders
and blow out the candles of the moon,
whispering, snickering,
cutting off the snicker and sobbing . .
out of pillow-wet kisses and tears?

Is the night woven of anything else
than the secret wishes of women,
the stretched empty arms of women?
the hair of women with stars and roses?
I asked the night these questions
I heard the night asking me these questions

I saw the night
put these whispered nothings
across the city dust and stones,
across a single yellow sunflower,
one stalk strong as a woman's wrist,

And the play of a light rain,
the jug-time folly of a light rain,
the creepers of a drizzle on the sidewalks
for the policemen and the railroad men,
for the home-goers and the homeless,
silver fans and funnels on the asphalt,
the many feet of a fog mist that crept away,

I saw the night
put these nothings across
and the night wind came saying Come-on
and the curve of sky swept off white clouds
and swept on white stars over Battery to Bronx,
scooped a sea of stars over Albany, Dobbs Ferry, Cape Horn, Constanti-
nople

I saw the night's mouth and lips
strange as a face next to mine on a pillow
and now I know as I knew always
the night is a lover of mine
I know the night is everything
I know the night is all the world.

I have seen gold lamps in a lagoon
play sleep and murmur
with never an eyelash,
never a glint of an eyelid,
quivering in the water-shadows

A taxi whizzes by, an owl car clutters, passengers yawn reading street signs,
a bum on a park bench shifts, another bum keeps his majesty of stone
stillness, the forty-foot split rocks of Central Park sleep the sleep of
stone whalebacks, the cornices of the Metropolitan Art mutter their
own nothings to the men with rolled-up collars on the top of a bus
Breaths of the sea salt Atlantic, breaths of two rivers, and a heave of haw-
sers and smokestacks, the swish of multiplied sloops and war dogs,
the hesitant hoo-hoo of coal boats among these I listen to Night
calling

I give you what money can never buy all other lovers change all others
go away and come back and go away again
I am the one you slept with last night
I am the one you sleep with tonight and
tomorrow night
I am the one whose passion kisses
keep your head wondering
and your lips aching
to sing one song
never sung before

at night's gypsy head
calling Come-on

These hands that slid to my neck and held me,
these fingers that told a story,
this gypsy head of hair calling Come-on
can anyone else come along now
and put across night's nothings again?

I have wanted kisses my heart stuttered at asking,
I have pounded at useless doors and called my people fools
I have staggered alone in a winter dark making mumble songs
to the sting of a blizzard that clutched and swore

It was the night in my blood
open dreaming night,
night of tireless sheet-steel blue
The hands of God washing something,
feet of God walking somewhere.

Panels

PANELS

THE west window is a panel of marching onions
Five new lilacs nod to the wind and fence boards
The rain dry fence boards, the stained knot holes,
heliograph a peace
(How long ago the knee drifts here and a blizzard
howling at the knot holes,
whistling winter war drums?)

DAN

EARLY May, after cold rain the sun baffling cold wind
Irish setter pup finds a corner near the cellar door,
all sun and no wind,
Cuddling there he crosses forepaws and lays his skull
Sideways on this pillow, dozing in a half-sleep,
Browns of hazel nut, mahogany, rosewood, played off
against each other on his paws
and head

WHIFFLETREE

GIVE me your anathema
 Speak new damnations on my head
 The evening mist in the hills is soft
 The boulders on the road say communion
 The farm dogs look out of their eyes and keep thoughts from the corn
 cribs
 Dirt of the reeling earth holds horseshoes
 The rings in the whiffletree count their secrets
 Come on, you

MASCOTS

I will keep you and bring hands to hold you against a great hunger
I will run a spear in you for a great gladness to die with
I will stab you between the ribs of the left side with a great love worth
remembering

THE SKYSCRAPER LOVES NIGHT

ONE by one lights of a skyscraper fling their checkering cross work on the
velvet gown of night

I believe the skyscraper loves night as a woman and brings her playthings
 she asks for, brings her a velvet gown,
And loves the white of her shoulders hidden under the dark feel of it all

The masonry of steel looks to the night for somebody it loves,
He is a little dizzy and almost dances waiting . dark

NEVER BORN

THE time has gone by
The child is dead
The child was never even born
Why go on? Why so much as begin?
How can we turn the clock back now
And not laugh at each other
As ashes laugh at ashes?

THIN STRIPS

IN a jeweler's shop I saw a man beating
out thin sheets of gold I heard a woman
laugh many years ago

Under a peach tree I saw petals scattered
 torn strips of a bride's dress I heard
a woman laugh many years ago.

FIVE CENT BALLOONS

PIETRO has twenty red and blue balloons on a string
They flutter and dance pulling Pietro's arm.
A nickel apiece is what they sell for

Wishing children tag Pietro's heels

He sells out and goes the streets alone.

MY PEOPLE

My people are gray,
pigeon gray, dawn gray, storm gray
I call them beautiful,
and I wonder where they are going

SWIRL

A SWIRL in the air where your head was once, here
You walked under this tree, spoke to a moon for me
I might almost stand here and believe you alive

WISTFUL

WISHES left on your lips
The mark of their wings
Regrets fly kites in your eyes

BASKET

SPEAK, sir, and be wise
Speak choosing your words, sir,
like an old woman over a bushel
of apples

FIRE PAGES

I WILL read ashes for you, if you ask me
I will look in the fire and tell you from the gray lashes
And out of the red and black tongues and stripes,
I will tell how fire comes
And how fire runs far as the sea

FINISH

DEATH comes once, let it be easy
Ring one bell for me once, let it go at that
Or ring no bell at all, better yet

Sing one song if I die
Sing John Brown's Body or Shout All Over God's Heaven
Or sing nothing at all, better yet

Death comes once, let it be easy

FOR YOU

THE peace of great doors be for you
Wait at the knobs, at the panel oblongs.
Wait for the great hinges

The peace of great churches be for you,
Where the players of loft pipe organs
Practice old lovely fragments, alone

The peace of great books be for you,
Stains of pressed clover leaves on pages,
Bleach of the light of years held in leather.

The peace of great prairies be for you
Listen among windplayers in cornfields,
The wind learning over its oldest music.

The peace of great seas be for you
Wait on a hook of land, a rock footing
For you, wait in the salt wash

The peace of great mountains be for you,
The sleep and the eyesight of eagles,
Sheet mist shadows and the long look across.

The peace of great hearts be for you,
Valves of the blood of the sun,
Pumps of the strongest wants we cry

The peace of great silhouettes be for you,
Shadow dancers alive in your blood now,
Alive and crying, "Let us out, let us out "

The peace of great changes be for you
Whisper, Oh beginners in the hills
Tumble, Oh cubs—tomorrow belongs to you

The peace of great loves be for you
Rain, soak these roots, wind, shatter the dry rot
Bars of sunlight, grips of the earth, hug these

The peace of great ghosts be for you,
Phantoms of night-gray eyes, ready to go
To the fog-star dumps, to the fire-white doors

Yes, the peace of great phantoms be for you,
Phantom iron men, mothers of bronze,
Keepers of the lean clean breeds

SLABS
OF THE SUNBURNT WEST

TO
HELGA

Slabs of the Sunburnt West

THE WINDY CITY

1

THE lean hands of wagon men
put out pointing fingers here,
picked this crossway, put it on a map,
set up their sawbucks, fixed their shotguns,
found a hitching place for the pony express,
made a hitching place for the iron horse,
the one-eyed horse with the fire-spit head,
found a homelike spot and said, "Make a home,"
saw this corner with a mesh of rails, shuttling
people, shunting cars, shaping the junk of
the earth to a new city

The hands of men took hold and tugged
And the breaths of men went into the junk
And the junk stood up into skyscrapers and asked
Who am I? Am I a city? And if I am what is my name?
And once while the time whistles blew and blew again
The men answered Long ago we gave you a name,
Long ago we laughed and said You? Your name is Chicago.

Early the red men gave a name to a river,
the place of the skunk,
the river of the wild onion smell,
Shee-caw-go

Out of the payday songs of steam shovels,
Out of the wages of structural iron rivets,
The living lighted skyscrapers tell it now as a name,

Tell it across miles of sea blue water, gray blue land
 I am Chicago, I am a name given out by the breaths of working men,
 laughing men, a child, a belonging

So between the Great Lakes,
 The Grand De Tour, and the Grand Prairie,
 The living lighted skyscrapers stand,
 Spotting the blue dusk with checkers of yellow,
 streamers of smoke and silver,
 parallelograms of night-gray watchmen,
 Singing a soft moaning song I am a child, a belonging

2

How should the wind songs of a windy city go?
 Singing in a high wind the dirty chatter gets blown
 away on the wind—the clean shovel,
 the clean pickax,
 lasts

It is easy for a child to get breakfast and pack off
 to school with a pair of roller skates,
 buns for lunch, and a geography
 Riding through a tunnel under a river running backward,
 to school to listen how the Pottawatomies
 and the Blackhawks . ran on moccasins
 between Kaskaskia, Peoria, Kankakee, and Chicago

It is easy to sit listening to a boy babbling
 of the Pottawatomie moccasins in Illinois,
 how now the roofs and smokestacks cover miles
 where the deerfoot left its writing
 and the foxpaw put its initials
 in the snow . . . for the early moccasins to read

It is easy for the respectable taxpayers to sit in the
 streetcars and read the papers, faces of burglars,
 the prison escapes, the hunger strikes, the cost of
 living, the price of dying, the shop gate battles of
 strikers and strikebreakers, the strikers killing

scabs and the police killing strikers—the strongest,
the strongest, always the strongest

It is easy to listen to the haberdasher customers hand each other their
easy chatter—it is easy to die
alive—to register a living thumbprint and be dead
from the neck up

And there are sidewalks polished with the footfalls of
undertakers' stiffs, greased mannikins, wearing up-to-
the-minute sox, lifting heels across doorsills,
shoving their faces ahead of them—dead from the
neck up—proud of their sox—their sox are the last
word—dead from the neck up—it is easy

3

Lash yourself to the bastion of a bridge
and listen while the black cataracts of people go by,
baggage, bundles, balloons,
listen while they jazz the classics

“Since when did you kiss yourself in
And who do you think you are?
Come across, kick in, loosen up
Where do you get that chatter?”

“Beat up the short-change artists
They never did nothin’ for you
How do you get that way?
Tell me and I’ll tell the world
I’ll say so, I’ll say it is ”

“You’re trying to crab my act
You poor fish, you mackerel,
You ain’t got the sense God
Gave an oyster—it’s raining—
What you want is an umbrella ”

“Hush baby—
I don’t know a thing
I don’t know a thing
Hush baby ”

“Hush baby,
 It ain’t how old you are,
 It’s how old you look
 It ain’t what you got,
 It’s what you can get away with ”

“Bring home the bacon
 Put it over, shoot it across
 Send ’em to the cleaners.
 What we want is results, re-sults
 And damn the consequences
 Sh . sh
 You can fix anything
 If you got the right fixers ”

“Kid each other, you cheap skates
 Tell each other you’re all to the mustard—
 You’re the gravy ”

“Tell ’em, honey
 Ain’t it the truth, sweetheart?
 Watch your step
 You said it
 You said a mouthful
 We’re all a lot of damn fourflushers ”

“Hush baby!
 Shoot it,
 Shoot it all!
 Coo coo, coo coo”—
 This is one song of Chicago

4

It is easy to come here a stranger and show the whole works, write a
 book, fix it all up—it is easy to come and go away a muddle-headed
 pig, a bum and a bag of wind

Go to it and remember this city fished from its
 depths a text “independent as a hog on ice ”

Venice is a dream of soft waters, Vienna and Bagdad recollections of dark spears and wild turbans, Paris is a thought in Monet gray on scabbards, fabrics, façades, London is a fact in a fog filled with the moaning of transatlantic whistles, Berlin sits amid white scrubbed quadrangles and torn arithmetics and testaments, Moscow brandishes a flag and repeats a dance figure of a man who walks like a bear.

Chicago fished from its depths a text Independent
as a hog on ice

5

Forgive us if the monotonous houses go mile on mile
Along monotonous streets out to the prairies—
If the faces of the houses mumble hard words
At the streets—and the street voices only say
“Dust and a bitter wind shall come ”
Forgive us if the lumber porches and doorsteps
Snarl at each other—
And the brick chimneys cough in a close-up of
Each other's faces—
And the ramshackle stairways watch each other
As thieves watch—
And dooryard lilacs near a malleable iron works
Long ago languished
In a short whispering purple

And if the alley ash cans
Tell the garbage-wagon drivers
The children play the alley is Heaven
And the streets of Heaven shine
With a grand dazzle of stones of gold
And there are no policemen in Heaven—
Let the rag-tags have it their way

And if the geraniums
In the tin cans of the window sills
Ask questions not worth answering—
And if a boy and a girl hunt the sun
With a sieve for sifting smoke—
Let it pass—let the answer be—
“Dust and a bitter wind shall come ”

Forgive us if the jazz timebeats
Of these clumsy mass shadows
Moan in saxophone undertones,
And the footsteps of the jungle,
The fang cry, the rip claw hiss,
The sneak-up and the still watch,
The slant of the slit eyes waiting—
If these bother respectable people
 with the night crimp in their napkins
 reading breakfast menu cards—
 forgive us—let it pass—let be

If cripples sit on their stumps
And joke with the newsies bawling,
“Many lives lost! many lives lost!
Ter-ri-ble ac-ci-dent! many lives lost!”—
If again twelve men let a woman go,
“He done me wrong, I shot him”—
Or the blood of a child’s head
Spatters on the hub of a motor truck—
Or a 44-gat cracks and lets the skylights
Into one more bank messenger—
Or if boys steal coal in a railroad yard
And run with humped gunnysacks
While a bull picks off one of the kids
And the kid wriggles with an ear in cinders
And a mother comes to carry home
A bundle, a limp bundle,
To have his face washed, for the last time,
Forgive us if it happens—and happens again—
And happens again

Forgive the jazz timebeat
of clumsy mass shadows,
footsteps of the jungle,
the fang cry, the rip claw hiss,
the slant of the slit eyes waiting.

Forgive us if we work so hard
And the muscles bunch clumsy on us

And we never know why we work so hard—
If the big houses with little families
And the little houses with big families
Sneer at each other's bars of misunderstanding,
Pity us when we shackle and kill each other
And believe at first we understand
And later say we wonder why

Take home the monotonous patter
Of the elevated railroad guard in the rush hours
"Watch your step Watch your step Watch your step"
Or write on a pocket pad what a pauper said
To a patch of purple asters at a whitewashed wall
"Let every man be his own Jesus—that's enough"

6

The wheelbarrows grin, the shovels and the mortar
hoist an exploit
The stone shanks of the Monadnock, the Transportation,
the People's Gas Building, stand up and scrape
at the sky
The wheelbarrows sing, the bevels and the blueprints
whisper
The library building named after Crerar, naked
as a stock farm silo, light as a single eagle
feather, stripped like an airplane propeller,
takes a path up
Two cool new rivets say, "Maybe it is morning,"
"God knows"

Put the city up, tear the city down,
put it up again, let us find a city
Let us remember the little violet-eyed
man who gave all, praying, "Dig and
dream, dream and hammer, till your
city comes"

Every day the people sleep and the city dies,
every day the people shake loose, awake and
build the city again

The city is a tool chest opened every day,
a time clock punched every morning,
a shop door, bunkers and overalls
counting every day

The city is a balloon and a bubble plaything
shot to the sky every evening, whistled in
a ragtime jig down the sunset

The city is made, forgotten, and made again,
trucks hauling it away haul it back
steered by drivers whistling ragtime
against the sunsets

Every day the people get up and carry the city,
carry the bunkers and balloons of the city,
lift it and put it down

“I will die as many times
as you make me over again,
says the city to the people,
I am the woman, the home, the family,
I get breakfast and pay the rent,
I telephone the doctor, the milkman, the undertaker,
I fix the streets
for your first and your last ride—
Come clean with me, come clean or dirty,
I am stone and steel of your sleeping numbers,
I remember all you forget
I will die as many times
as you make me over again”

Under the foundations,
Over the roofs,
The bevels and the blueprints talk it over
The wind of the lake shore waits and wanders
The heave of the shore wind hunches the sand piles
The winkers of the morning stars count out cities
And forget the numbers

7

At the white clock-tower
lighted in night purples
over the boulevard link bridge
only the blind get by without acknowledgments

The passers-by, factory punch-clock numbers,
hotel girls out for the air, teameoes,
coal passers, taxi drivers, window washers,
paperhangers, floorwalkers, bill collectors,
burglar alarm salesmen, massage students,
manicure girls, chiropodists, bath rubbers,
booze runners, hat cleaners, armhole basters,
delicatessen clerks, shovel stiffs, work plugs—
They all pass over the bridge, they all look up
at the white clock-tower
lighted in night purples
over the boulevard link bridge—
And sometimes one says, "Well, we hand it to 'em"

Mention proud things, catalogue them
The jack-knife bridge opening, the ore boats,
the wheat barges passing through
Three overland trains arriving the same hour,
one from Memphis and the cotton belt,
one from Omaha and the corn belt,
one from Duluth, the lumberjack and the iron range
Mention a carload of shorthorns taken off the valleys of Wyoming last
week, arriving yesterday, knocked in the head, stripped, quartered,
hung in ice boxes today, mention the daily melodrama of this hum
drum, rhythms of heads, hides, heels, hoofs hung up

8

It is wisdom to think the people are the city
It is wisdom to think the city would fall to pieces
and die and be dust in the wind
If the people of the city all move away and leave no people at all to watch
and keep the city

It is wisdom to think no city stood here at all until the working men, the
laughing men, came
It is wisdom to think tomorrow new working men, new laughing men, may
come and put up a new city—
Living lighted skyscrapers and a night lingo of lanterns testify tomorrow
shall have its own say-so

9

Night gathers itself into a ball of dark yarn
Night loosens the ball and it spreads
The lookouts from the shores of Lake Michigan
find night follows day, and ping! ping! across
sheet gray the boat lights put their signals
Night lets the dark yarn unravel, Night speaks and the yarns change to
fog and blue strands

The lookouts turn to the city
The canyons swarm with red sand lights
of the sunset
The atoms drop and sift, blues cross over,
yellows plunge
Mixed light shafts stack their bayonets,
pledge with crossed handles
So, when the canyons swarm, it is then the
lookouts speak
Of the high spots over a street . . . mountain language
Of skyscrapers in dusk, the Railway Exchange,
The People's Gas, the Monadnock, the Transportation,
Gone to the gloaming

The river turns in a half circle
The Goose Island bridges curve
over the river curve
Then the river panorama
performs for the bridge,
dots . . . lights . . . dots . . . lights,
sixes and sevens of dots and lights,
a lingo of lanterns and searchlights,
circling sprays of gray and yellow.

10

A man came as a witness saying
"I listened to the Great Lakes
And I listened to the Grand Prairie,
And they had little to say to each other,
A whisper or so in a thousand years
'Some of the cities are big,' said one
'And some not so big,' said another
'And sometimes the cities are all gone,'
Said a black knob bluff to a light green sea "

Winds of the Windy City, come out of the prairie,
all the way from Medicine Hat
Come out of the inland sea blue water, come where
they nickname a city for you

Corn wind in the fall, come off the black lands,
come off the whisper of the silk hangers,
the lap of the flat spear leaves

Blue water wind in summer, come off the blue miles
of lake, carry your inland sea blue fingers,
carry us cool, carry your blue to our homes

White spring winds, come off the bag wool clouds,
come off the running melted snow, come white
as the arms of snow-born children

Gray fighting winter winds, come along on the tear-
ing blizzard tails, the snouts of the hungry
hunting storms, come fighting gray in winter

Winds of the Windy City,
Winds of corn and sea blue,
Spring wind white and fighting winter gray,
Come home here—they nickname a city for you

The wind of the lake shore waits and wanders
The heave of the shore wind hunches the sand piles.
The winkers of the morning stars count out cities
And forget the numbers

WASHINGTON MONUMENT BY NIGHT

1

THE stone goes straight
A lean swimmer dives into night sky,
Into half-moon must.

2

Two trees are coal black.
This is a great white ghost between
It is cool to look at
Strong men, strong women, come here

3

Eight years is a long time
To be fighting all the time

4

The republic is a dream
Nothing happens unless first a dream

5

The wind bit hard at Valley Forge one Christmas
Soldiers tied rags on their feet
Red footprints wrote on the snow . . .
and stone shoots into stars here
into half-moon must tonight

6

Tongues wrangled dark at a man.
He buttoned his overcoat and stood alone
In a snowstorm, red hollyberries, thoughts,
he stood alone.

7

Women said He is lonely
fighting fighting . . . eight years

8

The name of an iron man goes over the world
It takes a long time to forget an iron man.

9

AND SO TODAY

And so today—they lay him away—
the boy nobody knows the name of—
the buck private—the unknown soldier—
the doughboy who dug under and died
when they told him to—that's him

Down Pennsylvania Avenue today the riders go,
men and boys riding horses, roses in their teeth,
stems of roses, rose leaf stalks, rose dark leaves—
the line of the green ends in a red rose flash

Skeleton men and boys riding skeleton horses,
the rib bones shine, the rib bones curve,
shine with savage, elegant curves—
a jawbone runs with a long white slant,
a skull dome runs with a long white arch,
bone triangles click and rattle,
elbows, ankles, white line slants—
shining in the sun, past the White House,
past the Treasury Building, Army and Navy Buildings,
on to the mystic white Capitol Dome—
so they go down Pennsylvania Avenue today,
skeleton men and boys riding skeleton horses,
stems of roses in their teeth,

rose dark leaves at their white jaw slants—
and a horse laugh question nickers and whinnies,
moans with a whistle out of horse head teeth
why? who? where?

 ("The big fish—eat the little fish—
 the little fish—eat the shrimps—
 and the shrimps—eat mud"—
 said a cadaverous man—with a black umbrella—
 spotted with white polka dots—with a missing
 ear—with a missing foot and arms—
 with a missing sheath of muscles
 singing to the silver sashes of the sun)

And so today—they lay him away—
the boy nobody knows the name of—
the buck private—the unknown soldier—
the doughboy who dug under and died
when they told him to—that's him

If he picked himself and said, "I am ready to die,"
if he gave his name and said, "My country, take me,"
then the baskets of roses today are for the Boy,
the flowers, the songs, the steamboat whistles,
the proclamations of the honorable orators,
they are all for the Boy—that's him

If the government of the Republic picked him saying,
"You are wanted, your country takes you"—
if the Republic put a stethoscope to his heart
and looked at his teeth and tested his eyes and said,
"You are a citizen of the Republic and a sound animal
in all parts and functions—the Republic takes you"—
then today the baskets of flowers are all for the Republic,
the roses, the songs, the steamboat whistles,
the proclamations of the honorable orators—
they are all for the Republic

And so today—they lay him away—
and an understanding goes—his long sleep shall be

under arms and arches near the Capitol Dome—
there is an authorization—he shall have tomb companions—
the martyred presidents of the Republic—
the buck private—the unknown soldier—that's him

The man who was war commander of the armies of the Republic
rides down Pennsylvania Avenue—
The man who is peace commander of the armies of the Republic
rides down Pennsylvania Avenue—
for the sake of the Boy, for the sake of the Republic

(And the hoofs of the skeleton horses
all drum soft on the asphalt footing—
so soft is the drumming, so soft the roll call
of the grinning sergeants calling the roll call—
so soft is it all—a camera man murmurs, "Moonshine")

Look—who salutes the coffin—
lays a wreath of remembrance
on the box where a buck private
sleeps a clean dry sleep at last—
look—it is the highest ranking general
of the officers of the armies of the Republic

(Among pigeon corners of the Congressional Library—they file documents quietly, casually, all in a day's work—this human document, the buck private nobody knows the name of—they file away in granite and steel—with music and roses, salutes, proclamations of the honorable orators)

Across the country, between two ocean shore lines,
where cities cling to rail and water routes,
there people and horses stop in their foot tracks,
cars and wagons stop in their wheel tracks—
faces at street crossings shine with a silence
of eggs laid in a row on a pantry shelf—
among the ways and paths of the flow of the Republic
faces come to a standstill, sixty clockticks count—
in the name of the Boy, in the name of the Republic.

(A million faces a thousand miles from Pennsylvania Avenue stay frozen with a look, a clocktick, a moment—skeleton riders on skeleton horses—the nickering high horse laugh, the whinny and the howl up Pennsylvania Avenue who? why? where?)

(So people far from the asphalt footing of Pennsylvania Avenue look, wonder, mumble—the riding white-jaw phantoms ride hi-eeee, hi-eeee, hi-yi, hi-yi, hi-eeee—the proclamations of the honorable orators mix with the top-sergeants whistling the roll call)

If when the clockticks counted sixty,
when the heartbeats of the Republic
came to a stop for a minute,
if the Boy had happened to sit up,
happening to sit up as Lazarus sat up, in the story,
then the first shivering language to drip off his mouth
might have come as, "Thank God," or "Am I dreaming?"
or "What the hell" or "When do we eat?"
or "Kill 'em, kill 'em, the "
or "Was that a rat ran over my face?"
or "For Christ's sake, gimme water, gimme water,"
or "Blub blub, bloo bloo "
or any bubbles of shell-shock gibberish
from the gashes of No Man's Land

Maybe some buddy knows,
some sister, mother, sweetheart,
maybe some girl who sat with him once
when a two-horn silver moon
slid on the peak of a house-roof gable,
and promises lived in the air of the night,
when the air was filled with promises,
when any little slip-shoe lovey
could pick a promise out of the air

"Feed it to 'em,
they lap it up,
bull bull . . . bull,"

Said a movie newsreel camera man,
Said a Washington newspaper correspondent,

Said a baggage handler lugging a trunk,
Said a two-a-day vaudeville juggler,
Said a hanky-pank selling jumping-jacks
"Hokum—they lap it up," said the bunch

And a tall scar-face ball player,
Played out as a ball player,
Made a speech of his own for the hero boy,
Sent an earful of his own to the dead buck private
 "It's all safe now, buddy,
 Safe when you say yes,
 Safe for the yes-men "

He was a tall scar-face battler
With his face in a newspaper
Reading want ads, reading jokes,
Reading love, murder, politics,
Jumping from jokes back to the want ads,
Reading the want ads first and last,
The letters of the word JOB, "J-O-B,"
Burnt like a shot of bootleg booze
In the bones of his head—
In the wish of his scar-face eyes
The honorable orators,
Always the honorable orators,
Buttoning the buttons on their prinz alberts,
Pronouncing the syllables "sac-ri-fice,"
Juggling those bitter salt-soaked syllables—
Do they ever gag with hot ashes in their mouths?
Do their tongues ever shrivel with a pain of fire
Across those simple syllables "sac-ri-fice"?

(There was one orator people far off saw
He had on a gunnysack shirt over his bones,
And he lifted an elbow socket over his head,
And he lifted a skinny signal finger
And he had nothing to say, nothing easy—
He mentioned ten million men, mentioned them as having gone west,
 mentioned them as shoving up the daisies

We could write it all on a postage stamp, what he said
He said it and quit and faded away,
A gunnysack shirt on his bones)

Stars of the night sky,
did you see that phantom fadeout,
did you see those phantom riders,
skeleton riders on skeleton horses,
stems of roses in their teeth,
rose leaves red on white-jaw slants,
grinning along on Pennsylvania Avenue,
the top-sergeants calling roll calls—
did their horses nicker a horse laugh?
did the ghosts of the boney battalions
move out and on, up the Potomac, over on the Ohio,
and out to the Mississippi, the Missouri, the Red River
and down to the Rio Grande, and on to the Yazoo,
over to the Chattahoochee and up to the Rappahannock?
did you see 'em, stars of the night sky?

And so today—they lay him away—
the boy nobody knows the name of—
they lay him away in granite and steel—
with music and roses—under a flag—
under a sky of promises

BLACK HORIZONS

BLACK horizons, come up
Black horizons, kiss me.
That is all, so many lies, killing so cheap,
babies so cheap; blood, people, so cheap, and
land high, land dear, a speck of the earth
costs, a suck at the tit of Mother Dirt so
clean and strong, it costs, fences, papers,
sheriffs, fences, laws, guns, and so many
stars and so few hours to dream; such a big
song and so little a footing to stand and

sing, take a look, wars to come, red rivers
to cross
Black horizons, come up
Black horizons, kiss me

SEA SLANT

On up the sea slant,
On up the horizon,
This ship limps

The bone of her nose fog-gray,
The heart of her sea-strong,
She came a long way,
She goes a long way

On up the horizon,
On up the sea-slant,
She limps sea-strong, fog-gray

She is a green-lit night gray
She comes and goes in sea fog
Up the horizon slant she limps

UPSTREAM

THE strong men keep coming on
They go down shot, hanged, sick,
broken
They live on fighting, singing,
lucky as plungers
The strong mothers pulling them
on
The strong mothers pulling them
from a dark sea, a great prairie,
a long mountain
Call hallelujah, call amen, call
deep thanks.
The strong men keep coming on.

FOUR STEICHEN PRINTS

THE earth, the rock and the oil of the earth, the slippery frozen places of the earth, these are for homes of rainbow bubbles, curves of the circles of a bubble, curves of the arcs of the rainbow prisms—between sun and rock they lift to the sun their foam feather and go

Throw your neck back, throw it back till the neck muscles shine at the sun, till the falling hair at the scalp is a black cry, till limbs and knee bones form an altar, and a girl's torso over the fire-rock torso shouts hi yi, hi yee, hallelujah

Goat girl caught in the brambles, deerfoot or fox-head, ankles and hair of feeders of the wind, let all the covering burn, let all stopping a naked plunger from plunging naked, let it all burn in this wind fire, let the fire have it in a fast crunch and a flash

They threw you into a pot of thorns with a wreath in your hair and bunches of grapes over your head—your hard little buttocks in the thorns—then the black eyes, the white teeth, the nameless muscular flair of you, rippled and twisted in sliding rising scales of laughter, the earth never had a gladder friend, pigs, goats, deer, tawny tough-haired jaguars might understand you

FINS

Plow over bars of sea plowing,
the moon by moon work of the sea,
the plowing, sand and rock, must
be done

Ride over, ride over bars of sea riding,
the sun and the blue riding of the sea—
sit in the saddles and say it, sea riders

Slant up and go, silver breakers, mix
the high howls of your dancing, shoot
your laugh of rainbow foam tops

Foam wings, fly, pick the comers, the fin pink,
the belly green, the blue rain sparks, the
white wave spit—fly, you foam wings

The men of the sea are gone to work, the women
of the sea are off buying new hats, combs, clocks,
it is rust and gold on the roofs of the sea

BEAT, OLD HEART

BEAT, old heart, these are the old bars
All strugglers have beat against
Beat on these bars like the old sea
Beats on the rocks and beaches
Beat here like the old winter winds
Beat on the prairies and timbers
Old grizzlies, eagles, buffalo,
Their paws and beaks register this
Their hides and heads say it with scars.

MOON RIDERS

1

WHAT have I saved out of a morning?
The earliest of the morning came with moon-mist
And the travel of a moon-spilt purple,
 Bars, horseshoes, Texas longhorns,
 Linked in night silver,
 Linked under leaves in moonlit silver,
 Linked in rags and patches
Out of the ice houses of the morning moon
Yes, this was the earliest—
Before the cowpunchers on the eastern rims

Began riding into the sun,
Riding the roan mustangs of morning,
Roping the mavericks after the latest stars
What have I saved out of a morning?
Was there a child face I saw once
Smiling up a stairway of the morning moon?

2

"It is time for work," said a man in the morning
He opened the faces of the clocks, saw their works,
Saw the wheels oiled and fitted, running smooth
"It is time to begin a day's work," he said again,
Watching a bull-finch hop on the rain-worn boards
Of a beaten fence counting its bitter winters
The slinging feet of the bull-finch and the flash
Of its flying feathers as it flipped away
Took his eyes away from the clocks, his flying eyes
He walked over, stood in front of the clocks again
And said, "I'm sorry, I apologize forty ways"

3

The morning paper lay bundled
Like a spear in a museum
Across the broken sleeping room
Of a moon-sheet spider.
The spinning work of the morning spider's feet
Left off where the morning paper's pages lay
In the shine of the web in the summer dew grass
The man opened the morning paper, saw the first page,
The back page, the inside pages, the editorials,
Saw the world go by, eating, stealing, fighting,
Saw the headlines, date lines, funnies, ads,
The marching movies of the workmen going to work, the workmen striking,
The workmen asking jobs—five million pairs of eyes look for a boss and
say, "Take me,"
People eating with too much to eat, people eating with nothing in sight
to eat tomorrow, eating as though eating belongs where people belong
"Hustle, you hustlers, while the hustling's good,"
Said the man, turning the morning paper's pages,

Turning among headlines, date lines, funnies, ads
"Hustlers carrying the banner," said the man
Dropping the paper and beginning to hunt the city,
Hunting the alleys, boulevards, back-door by-ways,
Hunting till he found a blind horse dying alone,
Telling the horse, "Two legs or four legs—it's all the same with a work
plug "

A hayfield mist of evening saw him
Watching moon riders lose the moon
For new shooting stars—he asked,
"Christ, what have I saved out of a morning?"
He called up a stairway of the morning moon
And he remembered a child face smiling up that same stairway

AT THE GATES OF TOMBS

CIVILIZATIONS are set up and knocked down
the same as pins in a bowling alley

Civilizations get into the garbage wagons
and are hauled away the same as potato
peelings or any pot scrapings

Civilizations, all the work of the artists,
inventors, dreamers of work and genius,
go to the dumps one by one

Be silent about it, since at the gates of tombs
silence is a gift, be silent, since at the epitaphs
written in the air, since at the swan songs hung in
the air, silence is a gift, be silent, forget it

If any fool, babblers, gabby mouth, stand up and say—
Let us make a civilization where the sacred and
beautiful things of toil and genius shall last—

If any such noisy gazook stands up and makes himself
heard—put him out—tie a can on him—lock him up

in Leavenworth—shackle him in the Atlanta hoosegow
 —let him eat from the tin dishes at Sing Sing—
 slew him in as a lifer at San Quentin

It is the law, as a civilization dies and goes down
 to eat ashes along with all other dead civilizations
 —it is the law all dirty wild dreamers die first—
 gag 'em, lock 'em up, get 'em bumped off

And since at the gates of tombs silence is a gift,
 be silent about it, yes, be silent—forget it

HAZARDOUS OCCUPATIONS

JUGGLERS keep six bottles in the air
 Club swingers toss up six and eight
 The knife throwers miss each other's
 ears by a hair and the steel quivers
 in the target wood
 The trapeze battlers do a back-and-forth
 high in the air with a girl's feet
 and ankles upside down
 So they earn a living—till they miss
 once, twice, even three times
 So they live on hate and love as gypsies
 live in satin skins and shiny eyes
 In their graves do the elbows jostle once
 in a blue moon—and wriggle to throw
 a kiss answering a dreamed-of applause?
 Do the bones repeat It's a good act—
 we got a good hand . . . ?

PROPS

1

ROLL open this rug a minx is
 in it, see her toe wiggling,
 roll open the rug; she is a

runaway, or somebody is trying
to steal her, here she is,
here's your minx, how can we
have a play unless we have
this minx?

2

The child goes out in the storm
stage thunder, "erring daughter,
never darken this doorsill again",
the tender parents speak their curse;
the child puts a few knick-knacks in
a handkerchief, and the child goes,
the door closes and the child goes,
she is out now, in the storm on the
stage, out forever, snow, you son-of-a-gun,
snow, turn on the snow

GYPSY MOTHER

In a hole-in-a-wall on Halsted Street sits a gypsy woman,
In a garish gas-lit rendezvous, in a humpback higgling hole-in-a-wall

The left hand is a tattler, stars and oaths and alphabets
Commit themselves and tell happenings gone, happenings to come, path-
ways of honest people, hypocrites

"Long pointed fingers mean imagination, a star on the third finger says a
black shadow walks near"

Cross the gypsy's hand with fifty cents and she takes your left hand and
reads how you shall be happy in love, or not, and whether you die
rich, or not

Signs outside the hole-in-a-wall say so, misspell the promises, scrawl the
superior gypsy mysteries

A red shawl on her shoulders falls with a fringe hem to a green skirt,
Chains of yellow beads sweep from her neck to her tawny hands
Fifty springtimes must have kissed her mouth holding a calabash pipe
She pulls slow contemplative puffs of smoke, she is a shape for ghosts of

contemplation to sit around and ask why something cheap as happiness is here and more besides, chapped lips, rough eyes, red shawl
She is thinking about somebody and something the same as Whistler's mother sat and thought about somebody and something

In a hole-in-a-wall on Halsted Street are stars, oaths, alphabets

GOLD MUD

(For R F)

THE pot of gold at the rainbow end
is a pot of mud, gold mud,
slippery shining mud

Pour it on your hair and you will
have a golden hair
Pour it on your cat and you will
have a golden cat
Pour it on your clock and you will
have a golden clock

Pour it on a dead man's thumb and
you will have a golden thumb
to bring you bad dreams
Pour it on a dead woman's ear and
you will have a golden ear
to tell hard luck stories to
Pour it on a horse chestnut and you
will have a golden buckeye
changing your luck
Pour it in the shape of a holy cross,
fasten it on my shirt for me to wear
and I will have a keepsake
I will touch it and say a prayer for you.

CROSSING THE PACES

THE Sioux sat around their wigwam fires
in winter with some papooses hung up
and some laid down
And the Sioux had a saying, "Love grows
like hair on a black bear's skin "

The Arabians spill this The first gray
hair is a challenge of death
A Polish blacksmith A good black-
smith is not afraid of smoke
And a Scandinavian warns The world was born
in fire and he who is fire himself will be
at home anywhere on earth
So a stranger told his children You are
strangers—and warned them

Bob your hair, or let it grow long,
Be a company, a party, a picnic,
Be alone, a nut, a potato, an orange blossom,
a keg of nails, if you get lost try a
want ad, if night comes try a long sleep

COUPLES

Six miasmic women in green
danced an absinthe dance
hissing oaths of laughter
at six men they cheated

Six miasmic men did the same
for six women they cheated.

It was a stand-off
in oaths of laughter hissed,

The dirt is hard where they danced
The pads of their feet made a floor

The weeds wear moon mist mourning veils.
The weeds come high as six little crosses,
One little cross for each couple

CALIGARI

MANNIKINS, we command you
Stand up with your white beautiful skulls
Stand up with your moaning sockets
Dance your stiff limping dances
We handle you with spic and span gloves
We tell you when and how
And how much

FEATHER LIGHTS

MACABRE and golden the moon opened a slant of light
A triangle for an oriole to stand and sing, "Take me home"
A layer of thin white gold feathers for a child queen of gypsies
So the moon opened a slant of light and let it go
So the lonesome dogs, the fog moon, the pearl mist, came back

PEARL HORIZONS

UNDER a prairie fog moon
in a circle of pearl mist horizons,
a few lonesome dogs scraping thongs,
midnight is lonely, the fog moon midnight
takes up again its even smooth November

Memories you can flick me and sting me
Memories, you can hold me even and smooth

A circle of pearl mist horizons
is not a woman to be walked up to and kissed,
nor a child to be taken and held for a good night,
nor any old coffee-drinking pal to be smiled at in the eyes and left with
a grip and a handshake

Pearl memories in the mist circling the horizon,
flick me, sting me, hold me even and smooth

HOOF DUSK

THE dusk of this box wood
is leather gold, buckskin gold,
and the hoofs of a dusk goat
leave their heel marks on it

The cover of this wooden box
is a last-of-the-sunset red,
a red with a sandman sand
fixed in evening siftings—
late evening sands are here

The gold of old clocks,
forgotten in garrets,
hidden out between battles
of long wars and short wars,
the smoldering ember gold
of old clocks found again—
here is the small smoke fadeout
of their slow loitering

Feel me with your fingers,
measure me in fire and wind
maybe I am buckskin gold, old clock gold,
late evening sunset sand—

Let go
and loiter
in the smoke fadeout

HARSK, HARSK

1

HARSK, harsk, the wind blows tonight
What a night for a baby to come into the world!
What a night for a melodrama baby to come
 And the father wondering
 And the mother wondering
What the years will bring on their stork feet
Till a year when this very baby might be saying
On some storm night when a melodrama baby is born
 “What a night
 for a baby
 to come into the world!”
Harsk, harsk, the wind blows tonight

2

It is five months off
Knit, stitch, and hemstitch
Sheets, bags, towels, these are the offerings
When he is older—or she is a big girl—
There may be flowers or ribbons or money
For birthday offerings Now, however,
We must remember it is a naked stranger
Coming to us, and the sheath of the arrival
Is so soft we must be ready, and soft too
Knit, stitch, hemstitch, it is only five months

3

It would be easy to pick a lucky star for this baby
If a choice of two stars lay before our eyes,
One a pearl gold star and one pearl silver,
And the offer of a chance to pick a lucky star.

4

When the high hour comes
Let there be a light flurry of snow,
A little zigzag of white spots
 Against the gray roofs.
The snow-born all understand this as a luck-wish

BRANCUSI

BRANCUSI is a galoot, he saves tickets to take him nowhere, a galoot with his baggage ready and no timetable, ah yes, Brancusi is a galoot, he understands birds and skulls so well, he knows the hang of the hair of the coils and plaits on a woman's head, he knows them so far back he knows where they came from and where they are going, he is fathoming down for the secrets of the first and the oldest makers of shapes

Let us speak with loose mouths today not at all about Brancusi because he has hardly started nor is hardly able to say the name of the place he wants to go when he has time and is ready to start, O Brancusi, keeping hardwood planks around your doorsteps in the sun waiting for the hardwood to be harder for your hard hands to handle, you Brancusi with your chisels and hammers, birds going to cones, skulls going to eggs—how the hope hugs your heart you will find one cone, one egg, so hard when the earth turns mist there among the last to go will be a cone, an egg

Brancusi, you will not put a want ad in the papers telling God it will be to his advantage to come around and see you, you will not grow gabby and spill God earfuls of prayers, you will not get fresh and familiar as if God is a next-door neighbor and you have counted His shirts on a clothes line, you will go stammering, stuttering and mumbling or you will be silent as a mouse in a church garret when the pipe organ is pouring ocean waves on the sunlit rocks of ocean shores, if God is saving a corner for any battling bag of bones, there will be one for you, there will be one for you, Brancusi

AMBASSADORS OF GRIEF

THERE was a little fliv of a woman loved one man and lost out And she took up with another and it was a blank again And she cried to God the whole layout was a fake and a frame-up And when she took up with Number Three she found the fires burnt out, the love power, gone. And she wrote a letter to God and dropped it in a mail-box. The letter said.

O God, ain't there some way you can fix it up so the little flivs of women, ready to throw themselves in front of railroad trains for men they love,

can have a chance? I guessed the wrong keys, I battered on the wrong panels, I picked the wrong roads O God, ain't there no way to guess again and start all over back where I had the keys in my hands, back where the roads all came together and I had my pick?

And the letter went to Washington, D C, dumped into a dump where all letters go addressed to God—and no house number

WITHOUT THE CANE AND THE DERBY

(For C C)

THE woman had done him wrong
Either that or the woman was clean as a white rose in the morning
gauze of dew

It was either one or the other or it was the two things, right and wrong,
woven together like two braids of a woman's head of hair hanging
down woven together

The room is dark The door opens It is Charlie playing for his friends
after dinner, "the marvelous urchin, the little genius of the screen,"
(chatter it like a monkey's running laughter cry)

No it is not Charlie it is somebody else It is a man, gray
shirt, bandana, dark face A candle in his left hand throws a slant
of light on the dark face The door closes slow The right hand leaves
the door knob slow

He looks at something What is it? A white sheet on a table He takes
two long soft steps He runs the candle light around a hump in the
sheet He lifts the sheet slow, sad like

A woman's head of hair shows, a woman's white face He takes the head
between his hands and looks long at it His fingers trickle under the
sheet, snap loose something, bring out fingers full of a pearl neck-
lace.

He covers the face and the head of hair with the white sheet He takes
a step toward the door The necklace slips into his pocket off the
fingers of his right hand His left hand lifts the candle for a good-by
look

Knock, knock, knock A knocking the same as the time of the human heartbeat.

Knock, knock, knock, first louder, then lower Knock, knock, knock, the same as the time of the human heartbeat.

He sets the candle on the floor leaps to the white sheet rips it back has his fingers at the neck, his thumbs at the throat, and does three slow fierce motions of strangling

The knocking stops All is quiet He covers the face and the head of hair with the white sheet, steps back, picks up the candle and listens

Knock, knock, knock, a knocking the same as the time of the human heartbeat

Knock, knock, knock, first louder, then lower Knock, knock, knock, the same as the time of the human heartbeat

Again the candle to the floor, the leap, the slow fierce motions of strangling, the cover-up of the face and the head of hair, the step back, the listening

And again the knock, knock, knock . louder . lower . to the time of the human heartbeat

Once more the motions of strangling . then nothing at all
nothing at all no more knocking no knocking at all
no knocking at all . . in the time of the human heartbeat

He stands at the door peace, peace, peace everywhere only in the man's face so dark and his eyes so lighted up with many lights, no peace at all, no peace at all

So he stands at the door, his right hand on the door knob, the candle slants of light fall and flicker from his face to the straight white sheet changing gray against shadows

So there is peace everywhere . no more knocking no knocking at all to the time of the human heartbeat so he stands at the door and his right hand on the door knob.

And there is peace everywhere . only the man's face is a red gray plaster of storm in the center of peace . so he stands with a candle at the door . so he stands with a red gray face

After he steps out the door closes, the door, the door knob, the table, the white sheet, there is nothing at all, the owners are shadows, the owners are gone, not even a knocking, not even a knock, knock, knock louder, lower, in the time of the human heartbeat

The lights are snapped on Charle, "the marvelous urchin, the little
 genius of the screen" (chatter it with a running monkey's laughter
 cry) Charlie is laughing a laugh the whole world knows
 The room is full of cream yellow lights Charlie is laughing louder
 lower
 And again the heartbeats laugh the human heartbeats laugh

THE RAKEOFF AND THE GETAWAY

"SHALL we come back?" the gamblers asked
 "If you want to, if you feel that way," the answer

And they must have wanted to,
 they must have felt that way,
 for they came back,
 hats pulled down over their eyes
 as though the rain or the policemen
 or the shadows of a sneaking scar-face Nemesis
 followed their tracks and hunted them down

"What was the clean-up? Let's see the rakeoff,"
 somebody asked them, looking into their eyes
 far under the pulled-down hat rims,
 and their eyes had only the laugh of the rain in them,
 lights of escape from a sneaking scar-face Nemesis
 hunting their tracks, hunting them down

Anvils, pincers, mosquitoes, anguish, raspberries,
 steaks and gravy, remorse, ragtime, slang,
 a woman's looking-glass to be held in the hand
 for looking at the face and the face make-up,
 blackwing birds fitted onto slits
 of the sunsets they were flying into,
 bitter green waters, clear running waters,
 standing pools ringing the changes
 of all the triangles of the equinoxes of the sky,
 and a woman's slipper
 with a tarnished buckle,
 a tarnished Chinese silver buckle

The gamblers snatched their hats off babbling,
"Some layout—take your pick, kid"

And their eyes had yet in them
the laugh of the ram
and the lights of their getaway
from a sneaking scar-face Nemesis

TWO HUMPTIES

THEY tried to hand it to us on a platter,
Us hit in the eyes with marconigrams from moon dancers—
And the bubble busted, went flooey, on a thumb touch.

So this time again, Humpty,
We cork our laughs behind solemn phizzogs,
Sweep the floor with the rim of our hats
And say good-a-by and good-a-by, just like that.

Tomorrow maybe they will be hit
in the eyes with marconigrams
From moon dancers
Good-a-by, our hats and all of us say good-a-by.

IMPROVED FARM LAND

TALL timber stood here once, here on a corn belt farm along the Monon
Here the roots of a half mile of trees dug their runners deep in the loam
for a grip and a hold against wind storms
Then the axmen came and the chips flew to the zing of steel and handle—
the lank railsplitters cut the big ones first, the beeches and the oaks,
then the brush
Dynamite, wagons and horses took the stumps—the plows sunk their
teeth in—now it is first class corn land—improved property—and the
hogs grunt over the fodder crops
It would come hard now for this half mile of improved farm land along
the Monon corn belt, on a piece of Grand Praine, to remember once
it had a great singing family of trees.

HELL ON THE WABASH

WHEN country fiddlers held a convention in
Danville, the big money went to a barn dance
artist who played Turkey in the Straw, with
variations

They asked him the name of the piece calling
it a humdinger and he answered, "I call it
'Hell On The Wabash' "

The two next best were The Speckled Hen, and
Sweet Potatoes Grow in Sandy Land, with
variations

THIS—FOR THE MOON—YES?

THIS is a good book? Yes?

Throw it at the moon

Stand on the ball of your right foot

And come to the lunge of a center fielder

Straddling in a throw for the home plate,

Let her go—spang—this book for the moon

—yes?

And then—other books, good books, even the
best books—shoot 'em with a long twist
at the moon—yes?

PRIMER LESSON

Look out how you use proud words

When you let proud words go, it is
not easy to call them back

They wear long boots, hard boots, they
walk off proud, they can't hear you
calling—

Look out how you use proud words.

SLABS OF THE SUNBURNT WEST

1

INTO the night, into the blanket of night,
Into the night rain gods, the night luck gods,
Overland goes the overland passenger train

Stand up, sandstone slabs of red,
Tell the overland passengers who burnt you

Tell 'em how the jacks and screws loosened you
Tell 'em who shook you by the heels and stood you on your heads,
Who put the slow pink of sunset mist on your faces.

Panels of the cold gray open night,
Gates of the Great American Desert,
 Skies keeping the prayers of the wagon men,
 The riders with picks, shovels and guns,
On the old trail, the Santa Fé trail, the Raton pass
Panels, skies, gates, listen tonight while we send up our prayers on the
 Santa Fé trail

(A colossal bastard frog
squats in stone
Once he squawked
Then he was frozen and
shut up forever)

Into the night the overland passenger train,
Slabs of sandstone red sink to the sunset red,
Blankets of night cover 'em up
Night rain gods, night luck gods, are looking on

March on, processions
Tie your hat to the saddle and ride, O Rider
Let your ponies drag their navels in the sand
Go hungry, leave your bones in the desert sand.
When the desert takes you the wind is clean
The winds say so on a noisy night

The fingerbone of a man
lay next to the handle of a frying pan
and the footbone of a horse
“Clean, we are clean,” the winds whimper on a noisy night

Into the night the overland passenger train,
And the engineer with an eye for signal lights,
And the porters making up berths for passengers,
And the boys in the diner locking the icebox—
And six men with cigars in the buffet car mention “civilization,” “his-
tory,” “God ”

Into the blanket of night goes the overland train,
Into the black of the night the processions march,
The ghost of a pony goes by,
A hat tied to the saddle,
The wagon tongue of a prairie schooner
And the handle of a Forty-niner’s pickax
Do a shiver dance in the desert dust,
In the coyote gray of the alkali dust
And—six men with cigars in the buffet car mention “civilization,” “his-
tory,” “God ”

Sleep, O wonderful hungry people
Take a shut-eye, take a long old snooze,
and be good to yourselves,
Into the night the overland passenger train
And the sleepers cleared for a morning sun
and the Grand Canyon of Arizona

2

A bluejay blue
and a gray mouse gray
ran up the canyon walls

A rider came to the rim
Of a slash and a gap of desert dirt—
A long-legged long-headed rider
On a blunt and a blurry jackass—
Riding and asking, “How come? How come?”

And the long-legged long-headed rider said
"Between two ears of a blurry jackass
I see ten miles of auburn, gold and purple—
I see doors open over doorsills
And always another door and a doorsill
Cheat my eyes, fill me with the float
Of your dream, you auburn, gold, and purple
Cheat me, blow me off my pins onto footless floors
Let me put footsteps in an airpath
Cheat me with footprints on auburn, gold, purple
Out to the last violet shimmer of the float
Of the dream—and I will come straddling a jackass,
Singing a song and letting out hallelujahs
To the doorsill of the last footprint"

And the man took a stub lead pencil
And made a long memo in shorthand
On the two blurry jackass ears —

"God sits with long whiskers in the sky"
I said it when I was a boy
I said it because long-whiskered men
Put it in my head to say it
 They lied about you God
 They lied

The other side of the five doors
and doorsills put in my house—
how many hinges, panels, doorknobs,
how many locks and lintels,
put on the doors and doorsills
winding and wild between
the first and the last doorsill of all?

"Out of the footprints on ten miles
of auburn, gold and purple—an old song comes
These bones shall rise again,
Yes, children, these bones shall rise

"Yonder past my five doors
are fifty million doors, maybe,

stars with knobs and locks and lintels,
stars with riders of rockets,
stars with swimmers of fire

“Cheat my eyes—and I come again—
straddling a jackass—singing a song—
letting out hallelujahs

“If God is a proud and a cunning Bricklayer,
Or if God is a King in a white gold Heaven,
Or if God is a Boss and a Watchman always watching,
I come riding the old ride of the humiliation,
Straddling a jackass, singing a song,
Letting out hallelujahs

“Before a ten mile float
of auburn, gold, and purple,
footprints on a sunset airpath haze,
 I ask
How can I taste with my tongue a tongueless God?
How can I touch with my fingers a fingerless God?
How can I hear with my ears an earless God?
Or smell of a God gone noseless long ago?
Or look on a God who never needs eyes for looking?

“My head is under your foot, God
My head is a pan of alkali dust
your foot kicked loose—your foot of air
with its steps on the sunset airpath haze

(A bluejay blue
and a gray mouse gray
ran up the canyon walls)

“Sitting at the rim of the big gap
at the high lash of the frozen storm line,
I ask why I go on five crutches,
tongues, ears, nostrils—all cripples—
eyes and nose—both cripples—
I ask why these five cripples

lump and squint and gag with me,
why they say with the oldest frozen faces
 Man is a poor stick and a sad squirt,
 if he is poor he can't dress up,
 if he dresses up he don't know any place to go

"Away and away on some green moon
a blind blue horse eats white grass
 And the blind blue horse knows more than I do
 because he saw more than I have seen
 and remembered it after he went blind

"And away and away on some other green moon
is a sea-kept child who lacks a nose I got
and fingers like mine and all I have
And yet the sea-kept child knows more than
I do and sings secrets alien to me as light
to a nosing mole underground
I understand this child as a yellow-belly
catfish in China understands peach pickers
at sunrise in September in a Michigan orchard

 "The power and lift of the sea
 and the flame of the old earth fires under,
I sift their meanings of sand in my fingers
I send out five sleepwalkers to find out who I am,
 my name and number, where I came from,
 and where I am going
They go out, look, listen, wonder, and shoot a fire-white rocket across
the night sky, the shot and the flare of the rocket dies to a whisper;
and the night is the same as it always was
They come back, my five sleepwalkers, they have an answer for me, they
say, they tell me Wait—the password all of them heard when the
fire-white rocket shot across the sky and died to a whisper, the pass-
word is Wait

"I sit with five binoculars, amplifiers, spectroscopes
I sit looking through five windows, listening, tasting, smelling, touching
I sit counting five million smoke fogs
Repeaters, repeaters, come back to my window-sills.

Some are pigeons coming to coo and coo and clean their tail feathers
and look wise at me

Some are pigeons coming with broken wings to die with pain in their
eyes on my window-sills

"I walk the high lash of the frozen storm line,
I sit down with my feet in a ten-mile gravel pit
Here I ask why I am a bag of sea-water fastened
to a frame of bones put walking on land—here I
look at crawlers, crimson, spiders spotted with
purple spots on their heads, flinging silver nets,
two, four, six, against the sun
Here I look two miles down to the ditch of the sea
and pick a winding ribbon, a river eater, a water
grinder, it is a runner sent to run by a stop-watch,
it is a wrecker on a rush job"

(A bluejay blue
and a gray mouse gray
ran up the canyon walls)

Battering rams, blind mules, mounted policemen,
trucks hauling caverns of granite, elephants
grappling gorillas in a death strangle, cathedrals,
arenas, platforms, somersaults of telescoped rail-
road train wrecks, exhausted egg heads, piles of
skulls, mountains of empty sockets, mummies of kings
and mobs, memories of work gangs and wrecking crews,
sobs of wind and water storms, all frozen and held
on paths leading on to spirals of new zigzags—

An arm-chair for a one-eyed giant;
two pine trees grow in the left arm of the chair,
a bluejay comes, sits, goes, comes again,
a bluejay shoots and twitters . . . out and across . . .
tumbled skyscrapers and wrecked battleships,
walls of crucifixions and wedding breakfasts,
ruin, ruin—a brute gnashed, dug, kept on—
kept on and quit and this is It

Falling away, the brute is working
Sheets of white veils cross a woman's face
An eye socket glooms and wonders
The brute hangs his head and drags on to the job
The mother of mist and light and air murmurs Wait

The weavers of light weave best in red,
better in blue

The weavers of shadows weave at sunset,
the young black-eyed women run, run, run
to the night star homes, the old women
sit weaving for the night rain gods,
the night luck gods

Eighteen old giants throw a red gold shadow ball,
they pass it along, hands go up and stop it, they
bat up flies and practice, they begin the game, they
knock it for home runs and two-baggers, the pitcher
put it across in an out- and an in-shoot drop, the
Devil is the Umpire, God is the Umpire, the game
is called on account of darkness

A bluejay blue
and a gray mouse gray
ran up the canyon walls

3

Good night, it is scribbled on the panels
of the cold gray open desert
Good night, on the big sky blanket over the
Santa Fé trail it is woven in the oldest
Indian blanket songs

Buffers of land, breakers of sea, say it and
say it, over and over, good night, good night

Tie your hat to the saddle
and ride, ride, ride, O Rider
Lay your rails and wires
and ride, ride, ride, O Rider.

The worn tired stars say
you shall die early and die dirty
The clean cold stars say
you shall die late and die clean

The runaway stars say
you shall never die at all,
never at all

GOOD MORNING, AMERICA

TO
A H

TENTATIVE (FIRST MODEL)
DEFINITIONS OF POETRY

- 1 *Poetry is a projection across silence of cadences arranged to break that silence with definite intentions of echoes, syllables, wave lengths*
- 2 *Poetry is an art practised with the terribly plastic material of human language*
- 3 *Poetry is the report of a nuance between two moments, when people say, 'Listen!' and 'Did you see it?' 'Did you hear it? What was it?'*
- 4 *Poetry is the tracing of the trajectories of a finite sound to the infinite points of its echoes*
- 5 *Poetry is a sequence of dots and dashes, spelling depths, crypts, cross-lights, and moon wisps*
- 6 *Poetry is a puppet-show, where riders of skyrockets and divers of sea fathoms gossip about the sixth sense and the fourth dimension*
- 7 *Poetry is a plan for a slit in the face of a bronze fountain goat and the path of fresh drinking water*
- 8 *Poetry is a slipknot tightened around a time-beat of one thought, two thoughts, and a last interweaving thought there is not yet a number for*
- 9 *Poetry is an echo asking a shadow dancer to be a partner*
- 10 *Poetry is the journal of a sea animal living on land, wanting to fly the air.*

- 11 Poetry is a series of explanations of life, fading off into horizons too swift for explanations
- 12 Poetry is a fossil rock-print of a fin and a wing, with an illegible oath between
- 13 Poetry is an exhibit of one pendulum connecting with other and unseen pendulums inside and outside the one seen
- 14 Poetry is a sky dark with a wild-duck migration
- 15 Poetry is a search for syllables to shoot at the barriers of the unknown and the unknowable
- 16 Poetry is any page from a sketchbook of outlines of a doorknob with thumb-prints of dust, blood, dreams
- 17 Poetry is a type-font design for an alphabet of fun, hate, love, death
- 18 Poetry is the cipher key to the five mystic wishes packed in a hollow silver bullet fed to a flying fish
- 19 Poetry is a theorem of a yellow-silk handkerchief knotted with riddles, sealed in a balloon tied to the tail of a kite flying in a white wind against a blue sky in spring
- 20 Poetry is a dance music measuring buck-and-wing follies along with the gravest and stateliest dead-marches
- 21 Poetry is a sliver of the moon lost in the belly of a golden frog
- 22 Poetry is a mock of a cry at finding a million dollars and a mock of a laugh at losing it
- 23 Poetry is the silence and speech between a wet struggling root of a flower and a sunlit blossom of that flower
- 24 Poetry is the harnessing of the paradox of earth cradling life and then entombing it
- 25 Poetry is the opening and closing of a door, leaving those who look through to guess about what is seen during a moment
- 26 Poetry is a fresh morning spider-web telling a story of moonlit hours of weaving and waiting during a night
- 27 Poetry is a statement of a series of equations, with numbers and symbols changing like the changes of murrors, pools, skies, the only never-changing sign being the sign of infinity

-
- 28 *Poetry is a packsack of invisible keepsakes*
 - 29 *Poetry is a section of river-fog and moving boat-lights, delivered between bridges and whistles, so one says, 'Oh!' and another, 'How!'*
 - 30 *Poetry is a kinetic arrangement of static syllables*
 - 31 *Poetry is the arithmetic of the easiest way and the primrose path, matched up with foam-flanked horses, bloody knuckles, and bones, on the hard ways to the stars*
 - 32 *Poetry is a shuffling of boxes of illusions buckled with a strap of facts*
 - 33 *Poetry is an enumeration of birds, bees, babies, butterflies, bugs, bambinos, babayagas, and bipeds, beating their way up bewildering bastions*
 - 34 *Poetry is a phantom script telling how rainbows are made and why they go away*
 - 35 *Poetry is the establishment of a metaphorical link between white butterfly-wings and the scraps of torn-up love-letters*
 - 36 *Poetry is the achievement of the synthesis of hyacinths and biscuits*
 - 37 *Poetry is a mystic, sensuous mathematics of fire, smoke-stacks, waffles, pansies, people, and purple sunsets*
 - 38 *Poetry is the capture of a picture, a song, or a flair, in a deliberate prism of words.*

Good Morning, America

GOOD MORNING, AMERICA

1

In the evening there is a sunset sonata comes to the cities
There is a march of little armies to the dwindling of drums
The skyscrapers throw their tall lengths of walls into black bastions on
the red west
The skyscrapers fasten their perpendicular alphabets far across the chang
ing silver triangles of stars and streets

And who made 'em? Who made the skyscrapers?
Man made 'em, the little two-legged joker, Man
Out of his head, out of his dreaming, scheming skypiece,
Out of proud little diagrams that danced softly in his head—Man made
the skyscrapers
With his two hands, with shovels, hammers, wheelbarrows, with engines,
conveyors, signal whistles, with girders, molds, steel, concrete—
Climbing on scaffolds and falsework with blueprints, nding the beams
and dangling in mid-air to call, Come on, boys—
Man made the skyscrapers

When one tall skyscraper is torn down
To make room for a taller one to go up,
Who takes down and puts up those two skyscrapers?
Man the little two-legged joker Man

2

"There's gold in them hills,"
Said old timers on their wagon seats
And on the wagons was a scribble:
Pike's Peak or Bust.

The Rocky Mountains are stacked tall on the skyline
Sunrise and dawns wash on the skyline every morning
Sunset feathers of foam float red and fade pink

And so,

Quite so,

Facts are facts, nailed down, fastened to stay
And facts are feathers, foam, flying phantoms
Niagara is a fact or a little bluebird cheeping in a flight over the Falls—
Chirping to itself What have we here?
And how come?

The stone humps of old mountains
Sag and lift in a line to the sky
The sunsets come with long shadowprints
The six-cylinder go-getters ask
What time is it?
Who were the Aztecs and the
Zunis anyhow?
What do I care about Cahokia?
Where do we go from here?
What are the facts?

3

Facts stay fastened, facts are phantom
An old one-horse plow is a fact
A new farm tractor is a fact
Facts stay fastened, facts fly with bird wings
Blood and sweat are facts, and
The commands of imagination, the looks back and ahead,
The spirals, pivots, landing places, fadeaways,
The signal lights and dark stars of civilizations.

Now the head of a man, his eyes, are facts.
He sees in his head, as in looking-glasses,
A cathedral, ship, bridge, railroad—a skyscraper—
And the plans are drawn, the blueprints fixed,
The design and the line, the shape written clear
So fact moves from fact to fact, weaves, intersects.
Then come more, then come blood and sweat

Then come pain and death, lifting and groaning,
And a crying out loud, between paydays
Then the last ghost on the job walks
The job stands up, the joined stresses of facts,
The cathedral, ship, bridge, railroad—the skyscraper—
Speaks a living hello to the open sky,
Stretches forth as an acknowledgement

“The big job is done
By God, we made it”

Facts stay fastened, facts fly with phantom bird wings

4

I have looked over the earth and seen the swarming of different people
to a different God—

White men with prayers to a white God, black men with prayers to a
black God, yellow-faces before altars to a yellow-face God—

Amid burning fires they have pictured God with a naked skin, amid
frozen rocks they have pictured God clothed and shaggy as a polar
bear—

I have met stubs of men broken in the pain and mutilation of war say-
ing God is forgetful and too far off, too far away—

I have met people saying they talk with God face to face, they tell God,
hello God and how are you God, they get familiar with God and
hold intimate conversations—

Yet I have met other people saying they are afraid to see God face to
face for they would ask questions even as God might ask them
questions

I have seen these facts of God and man and anxious earthworms hunt-
ing for a home

I have seen the facts of humblebees and scarlet butterflies, orioles and
flickers, goldwing moths and pink lady-bugs—

I have seen the spotted sunset sky filled with flights and wings—and I
have heard high in the twilight blue the propellers of man and the
evening air mail droning from Omaha to Chicago, droning across
Iowa and Illinois—

I have said The prints of many new wings, many fresh flights, many
clean propellers, shall be on the sky before we understand God and
the work of wings and air.

5

I have seen the figures of heroes set up as memorials, testimonies of fact—
Leif Ericson in a hard, deep-purple bronze, stands as a frozen shadow,
lean, with searching eyes, on a hill in Wisconsin overlooking Lake
Michigan—

Columbus in bronze is the center of a turmoil of traffic from world ends
gathered on Manhattan Island—

Washington stands in marble shaped from life, in the old Romanesque
temple on Capitol Hill, in Richmond, Virginia, with an arrogant
laughter heard from circling skyscrapers—

Andrew Jackson in bronze on a bronze horse, a rocking horse on its hind
legs with forepaws in the air, the tail brandishing, as the General lifts
a cockade from his head in salutation to the citizens and soldiers of
the Republic—

Ulysses S Grant, somber and sober, is on a pony high in bronze listening
to the endless white horses of Lake Michigan talking to Illinois—

Robert E Lee, recumbent in white stone, sleeps a bivouac sleep in peace
among loved ones of the southern Shenandoah Valley—

Lincoln's memory is kept in a living, arterial highway moving across state
lines from coast to coast to the murmur, Be good to each other,
sisters, don't fight, brothers

6

And may we ask—is a flower a fact?

Shall a thin perishable blossom

Mount out of homeland soil

And give the breath of its leaves

For a memorial printed a few days,

For a symbol kept by the bees and the wind?

Shall each state pick its favorite flower

And say, This is Me, Us, this comes from the dirt of the earth, the loam,
the mulch, this is a home greeting to our eyes, these leaves touch
our footloose feet, our children and our children's children

The blue cornflower along the railroad tracks in Illinois—

The pink moccasin hiding in the big woods of Minnesota—

The wild prairie rose scrambling along Iowa roads—

Golden poppy of California, giant cactus of Arizona—

Apple blossom of Michigan, Kentucky's trumpet vine—

The rhododendrons of Washington and West Virginia—

The Indian paintbrush of Wyoming, Montana's bitter root—
Vital and endless goldenrod crossing Nebraska—
Mariposa lily of Utah, pasque flower of South Dakota—
Ox-eyed daisy of North Carolina, Florida's orange blossom—
The magnolia of Louisiana, the Delaware peach blossom—
The silent laughing salutations of the Kansas sunflower—
The old buffalo clover, the marching Texas bluebonnet—
The pine cone and tassel of the lonesome State of Maine—
Shall these be among our phantom facts?

7

Facts are phantom, facts begin
With a bud, a seed, an egg

A hero, a hoodlum, a little of both,
A toiling two-faced driven destiny,
Sleeps in the secret tracteries of eggs
If one egg could speak and answer the question,
Egg, who are you, what are you, where did you
come from and where are you going?
If one egg could break through the barriers, pass
all interference and tell that much, then we
could tell how the earth came—
how we came with hair, lungs, noses
to sit on the earth and eat our breakfasts,
to sleep with our mates
and to salute the moon between sleeps,
to meditate on worms in the dust
and how they fail to divulge the designs
of the dark autocracies of their fates

Let one egg tell and we would understand a billion eggs
The newborn child, dried behind the ears,
Swaddled in soft cloths and groping for nipples,
Comes from a payday of love so old,
So involved, so traced with circles of the moon,
So cunning with secrets of the salts of blood,
It must be older than the moon, older than the salt sea
And do nations go back to the secret tracteries of eggs?
To beginnings that fail to divulge the designs?
Can we say to the unborn, Egg, who are you? Egg, divulge your design

Nations begin young the same as babies
They suckle and struggle, they grow up,
They toil, fight, laugh, suffer, die
They obey the traced circles of the moon
They follow the ordained times of night, morning, afternoon, evening,
and night again
They stand up and have their day on the pavilion of the Four Winds
The night sky of stars watches them begin, wear out, and fade away be-
fore newcomers, before silence, before empty pavilions
They leave flags, slogans, alphabets, numbers, tools, tales of flaming per-
formances, they leave moths, manuscripts, memories

And so, to the pavilion of the four winds
Came the little one they called America,
One that suckled, struggled, toiled, laughed, grew
America began young the same as a baby
The little new republic had its swaddling cloths,
Its child shirt, its tussle to knit long bone joints
And who can read the circle of its moons now?
And who shall tell beforehand the secrets of its
salts and blood?

8

Turn back and look at those men riding horses, sitting in saddles, smell-
ing of leather, going to Boston, to Richmond, in velvet knicker-
bockers, in silk stockings, in slippers with silver buckles, white-
powdered wigs on their heads, speaking of "the honor of a gentle-
man," singing "God rest ye, merry gentlemen," meeting carpenters
who built staircases and gables with their hands, the work-day was
sunup till sundown, they drove handwrought nails, the smoothing of
their own hands was on their woodwork

Look back, they are pinching their fingers in silver and gold snuff boxes,
lifting tankards of ale, discussing titles to many miles of land, coun-
ties and townships of land, a gentleman rides all day to round his
boundaries, and the jail doors cling to their brass locks holding the
dregs, the convicts of debt

Look back,
And that was long ago

America was new born
The republic was a baby, a child,
Fresh wiped behind the ears,
Blinking, tussling to knit the long
 new bone joints

Look back, there is an interlude, men in covered wagons, in buckskin,
 with plows, rifles, six-shooters, sweep west, the Havana cigar, the
 long pantaloons, the Mississippi steamboat, the talking wires, the
 iron horse

Yes, there was an interlude
 Something happened, always something happens
History is a living horse laughing at a wooden horse
History is a wind blowing where it listeth
History is no sure thing to bet on
History is a box of tricks with a lost key
History is a labyrinth of doors with sliding panels, a book of ciphers with
 the code in a cave of the Sargossa sea
History says, if it pleases, Excuse me, I beg your pardon, it will never
 happen again if I can help it

Yes, there was an interlude,
And phantoms washed their white shirts
Over and over again in buckets of blood—
And the saddest phantom of all stood up at Gettysburg
And tried to tell right from wrong and left the most
 of it unsaid, in the air

The years go by with their numbers, names,
 So many born, so many gone
Again the Four Horsemen take their laughter
Men walk on air and tumble from the sky
Men grapple undersea and soak their bones along rust-brown, rust-flaked
 turbines on the sea bottom
Men bite the dust from bullets, bombs, bayonets, gas,
Till ten million go west without time for a good-by,
Till double ten million are cripples for life,

Blind, shocked, broken storm children
Boys singing Hinky Dinky Parley Voo
Come back from the oversea vortex,
From the barrages of No Man's Land,
Saying with gleams deep in their eyes,
"There is nothing to say, ask me no questions"

9

Steel, coal, oil, the test tube arise as facts, dominions,
Standing establishments with world ambassadors
Between two seashores comes a swift interweaving of blood and bones,
nerves and arteries, rail and motor paths, airways and airports, tunnels,
wires, broadcasts on high and low frequencies to the receiving sets
The train callers call All Aboard for transcontinental flyers, it is seaboard
to seaboard, and the tincan tourists buy gas and follow the bird migrations

The concrete highways crack under the incessant tires of two-ton, ten-ton trucks—and the concrete mixers come with laughing bellies filled with gravel for the repair jobs

The talk runs—of the boll-weevil in the cotton, the doodle bug in the oil fields, the corn borer—of the lame duck in Congress, the farm bloc, the Ku Klux, a new sucker born every minute, sales canvass and selling spiels—

The talk runs—of crime waves, boy murderers, two women and a man, two men and a woman, bootleggers, the beer racket and the high-jackers, gang fights, cloud-bursts, tornadoes, floods, the Lakes-to-Gulf waterway, Boulder Dam—

The latest songs go from Broadway west across the country—the latest movies go from Hollywood east across the country—in a million homes they set their dials and listen to jazz numbers, the classics, the speech of the President in Washington, the heavyweight championship fight, the symphonies of the music masters

10

Voices—telling mankind to look itself in the face—who are you? what are you? we'll tell you—here is the latest—this is what Man has done today on the pavilion of the four winds, on the arcs of the globe—

As the dusty red sun settles in the dayend the sport sheets blaze forth
telling the box scores, the touchdowns, the scandals—pictures of
dying champions, of new claimants, fresh aspirants calling challenges
—of over-sea flyers, winners and losers—of new and old darlings of
destiny—

Fate's crapshooters fading each other, big Dick or snake eyes, midnights
and deuces, chicken one day and feathers the next, the true story of
how an ash can became a verandah and vice versa

11

A code arrives, language, lingo, slang,
behold the proverbs of a people, a nation
Give 'em the works Fix it, there's always
a way Be hard boiled The good die young

Be a square shooter Be good, if you can't
be good be careful When they put you in
that six foot bungalow, that wooden kimono,
you're through and that's that

Sell 'em, sell 'em Make 'em eat it What
if we gyp 'em? It'll be good for 'em Get their
names on the dotted line and give 'em the haha

The higher they go the farther they drop
The fewer the sooner Tell 'em Tell 'em
Make 'em listen They got to listen when
they know who you are Don't let 'em know
what you got on your hip Hit 'em where
they ain't It's good for whatever ails
you and if nothing ails you it's good for
that. Where was you raised—in a barn?

They're a lot of muckers, tin horns, show
those slobs where they get off at Tell 'em
you're going to open a keg of nails Beat 'em
to a fare-thee-well Hand 'em the razz-bernes
Clean 'em and then give 'em carfare home

Maybe all you'll get from 'em you can put in
your ear, anyhow

They got a fat nerve to try to tie a can
on you Send 'em to the cleaners Put the
kibosh on 'em so they'll never come back
You don't seem to know four out of five
have pyorrhea in Peoria

Your head ain't screwed on wrong, I trust
Use your noodle, your nut, your think tank,
your skypiece God meant for you to use it
If they offer to let you in on the ground
floor take the elevator

Put up a sign Don't worry, it won't last,
nothing does Put up a sign In God we
trust, all others pay cash Put up a sign
Be brief, we have our living to make Put
up a sign Keep off the grass

Aye, behold the proverbs of a people
The big word is Service
Service—first, last and always
Business is business
What you don't know won't hurt you
Courtesy pays
Fair enough
The voice with a smile
Say it with flowers
Let one hand wash the other
The customer is always right
Who's your boy friend?
Who's your girl friend?
O very well
God reigns and the government at Washington lives
Let it go at that
There are lies, dam lies and statistics
Figures don't lie but liars can figure
There's more truth than poetry in that
You don't know the half of it, dearie

It's the roving bee that gathers the honey ¹
 A big man is a big man whether he's a president or a prizefighter ²
 Name your poison
 Take a little interest
 Look the part
 It pays to look well
 Be yourself
 Speak softly and carry a big stick ³
 War is hell
 Honesty is the best policy.
 It's all in the way you look at it
 Get the money—honestly if you can
 It's hell to be poor
 Well, money isn't everything
 Well, life is what you make it
 Speed and curves—what more do you want?
 I'd rather fly than eat ⁴
 There must be pioneers and some of them get killed ⁵
 The grass is longer in the backyard ⁶
 Give me enough Swedes and snuff and I'll build a railroad to hell ⁷
 How much did he leave? All of it ⁸
 Can you unscramble eggs? ⁹
 Early to bed and early to rise and you never meet any prominent people ⁹
 Let's go Watch our smoke Excuse our dust
 Keep your shirt on

12

First come the pioneers, lean, hungry, fierce, dirty
 They wrangle and battle with the elements

¹ On hearing from his father "A rolling stone gathers no moss," John L. Sullivan won one of his important early fights and telegraphed this reply

² John L. Sullivan's greeting spoken to President Theodore Roosevelt in the White House

³ A Spanish proverb first Americanized by Theodore Roosevelt

⁴ Charles A. Lindbergh

⁵ Based on a Republican campaign story in 1892 alleging that a man on all fours eating grass on the White House lawn told President Grover Cleveland, "I'm hungry," and was advised, "The grass is longer in the backyard"

⁶ A saying that took rise from James J. (Jim) Hill

⁷ A folk tale in Chicago chronicles two ditch diggers on the morning after Marshall Field died, leaving an estate of \$150,000,000, as having this dialogue

⁸ J. Pierpont Morgan's query as to court decrees dissolving an inevitable industrial combination

⁹ George Ade

They gamble on crops, chills, ague, rheumatism
They fight wars and put a nation on the map
They battle with blizzards, lice, wolves
They go on a fighting trail
To break sod for unnumbered millions to come

Then the fat years arrive when the fat drips
Then come the rich men baffled by their riches,
Bewildered by the silence of their tall possessions
Then come the criers of the ancient desperate taunt

 Stuff your guts
 and strut your stuff,
 strut it high and handsome,
 when you die you're dead
 and there's no comeback
 and not even the winds
 will say your name—
 feed, oh pigs, feed, oh swine

Old timer, dust of the earth so kindly,
Old timer, dirt of our feet and days
Old time gravel and gumbo of the earth,
Take them back kindly,
These pigs, these swine
The bones of them and their brothers blanch to the same yellow of the
 years

13

Since we sell the earth with a fence around it,
Since one man sells the ocean to another and guarantees a new roof and
 all modern conveniences,
Since we sell everything but the blue sky and only the Blue Sky Laws
 stop us selling that,
Since we sell justice, since we sell pardons for crimes,
Since we sell land titles, oil claims, ninety-nine year options, all-day
 suckers and two-minute eggs—
Since we have coined a slogan, Never give the sucker an even break and
 the Old Army Game goes—
Since the selling game is the big game and unless you know how to sell
 you're a bum and that ain't all—

Since the city hicks and the hicks from the sticks go to the latest Broadway hit hoping to fix their glims on a birdie with her last feather off in a bathtub of booze—

Let the dance go on—let the stalking stuffed cadavers of old men run the earth and call up the Four Horsemen

14

Now it's Uncle Sam sitting on top of the world

Not so long ago it was John Bull and, earlier yet, Napoleon and the eagles of France told the world where to get off at

Spain, Rome, Greece, Persia, then blunderbuss guns, their spears, catapults, ships, took their turn at leading the civilizations of the earth—

One by one they were bumped off, moved over, left behind, taken for a ride, they died or they lost the wallop they used to pack, not so good, not so good

One by one they no longer sat on top of the world—now the Young Stranger is Uncle Sam, is America and the song goes, "The stars and stripes forever!" even though "forever" is a long time

Even though the oldest kings had their singers and clowns calling, "Oh king, you shall live forever"

15

In God we trust, it is so written

The writing goes onto every silver dollar

The fact God is the great One who made us all

We is you and me and all of us in the United States of America

And trusting God means we give ourselves, all of ourselves, the whole United States of America, to God, the great One

Yes perhaps is that so?

16

The silent litany of the workmen goes on—

Speed, speed, we are the makers of speed

We make the flying, crying motors,

Clutches, brakes, and axles,

Gears, ignitions, accelerators,

Spokes and springs and shock absorbers

The silent litany of the workmen goes on—

Speed, speed, we are the makers of speed,

Axles, clutches, levers, shovels,

We make the signals and lay the way—
Speed, speed
The trees come down to our tools
We carve the wood to the wanted shape
The whining propeller's song in the sky,
The steady drone of the overland truck,
Comes from our hands, us, the makers of speed

Speed, the turbines crossing the Big Pond,
Every nut and bolt, every bar and screw,
Every fitted and whirling shaft,
They came from us, the makers,
Us, who know how,
Us, the high designers and the automatic feeders,
Us, with heads,
Us, with hands,
Us, on the long haul, the short flight,
We are the makers, lay the blame on us—
The makers of speed

17

There is a Sleepwalker
goes walking and talking—

I promise you nothing, there are too many promises
I bring you a package so little, so thin, you can hide it anywhere, in your
shoes, in your ear, in a corner of your heart
I bring you a handkerchief, so filmy a gauze of silk, so foamy a fabric,
you pick it up and put it away as you put away a bubble, a morning
cobweb in the sun, a patch of moon dropped from two lilacs
I bring you gold, beaten so thin with so many little hammers it is thinner
than the morning laughter of hummingbirds flitting among diamond
dewdrops yet hard as an anvil wearing out the strongest hammers

There is a Sleepwalker
goes walking and talking—

Go alone and away from all books, go with your own heart into the
storm of human hearts and see if somewhere in that storm there are
bleeding hearts, sacred hearts taking a bitter wages of doom, red-
soaked and crimson-plunged hearts of the Redeemer of Man

Walk by yourself and find the silence where a whisper of your lips is the same as a pounding and a shouting at the knobs and panels of great doors

Walk again where the mass human shadows foregather, where the silhouettes and pantomimes of the great human procession wind with a crying out loud, and rotten laughers mix with raging tumults—

And between the being born and the being dead of the generations they march, march, march, to the drums, drums, drums, of the three facts of arriving, living, departing—

Go where the shadows string from winding pilgrim cohorts, where the line of the march twists and reels, and a hundred years is nothing much and a thousand or a million years nothing much, as they march, march, march, to the drums, drums, drums, of the three facts

Go there and let your heart be soft, fading as rainbows on slants of rain in the sun let your heart be full of riddles as white steel and its blue shadows

There is a sleepwalker
goes walking and talking—

We are afraid What are we afraid of?

We are afraid of what we are afraid of

We are afraid of this, that, these, those, them

We are afraid the earth will blow up and bomb the human family out of its sleep, its slumber, its sleepwalking, its pass and repass of shadows

We are afraid the sky will come apart and fall on us and in a rain of stars we will wash out into the Great Alone, the Deep Dark, saying, "Good-by old Mother Earth, we always were afraid of you"

We are afraid, what are we afraid of? We are afraid of nothing much, nothing at all, nothing in the shape of god, man or beast, we can eat any ashes offered us, we can step out before the fact of the Fact of Death and look it in the eye and laugh, "You are the beginning or the end of something, I'll gamble with you, I'll take a chance"

And we, us, the people,
We who of course are no sleepwalkers,
Perhaps we may murmur—

Perhaps as the airmen slip into their leather coats,
 Gambling for the timetables as against the skull and crossbones,
 Riding with mail sacks across orange blossoms, the desert cactus, the
 Rockies, the Great Plains, the Mississippi, the corn belt, the Appa-
 lachians,
 Riding with mail sacks, with a clutch on the steering wheels in storms
 and stars, with a passing cry, "Good luck and God bless you,"
 Perhaps while they ride and gamble on the new transcontinental sky
 paths, perhaps we may ask and murmur—
 Good morning, America
 Good morning, Mr Who, Which, What
 Good morning, let's all of us tell our
 real names
 Good morning, Mr Somebody, Nobody, Any-
 body-who-is-Anybody-at-all
 Good morning, Worms in the Dust, Eagles
 in the Air, Climbers to the Top of
 the Sky

19

You have kissed good-by to one century, one little priceless album
 You will yet kiss good-by to ten, twenty centuries Ah! you shall have
 such albums!
 Your mothers, America, have labored and carried harvests of generations—
 Across the spillways come further harvests, new tumultuous populations,
 young strangers, crying, "We are here! We belong! look at us!"
 Good morning, America!
 Morning goes as morning-glories go!
 High noon goes, afternoon goes!
 Twilight, sundown, gloaming—
 The hour of writing Good night, America!
 Good night, sleep, peace, and sweet dreams!

20

The prints of many new ships shall be on the sky
 The Four Horsemen shall ride again in a bitter dust,
 The granaries of great nations shall be the food of fat rats,
 And the shooting stars shall write new alphabets on the sky
 Before we come home,
 Before we understand

Off in our western sky,
Off in a burning maroon,
Shall come in a wintrish haze,
Shall come in points and crystals—
A shovel of stars

Let us wigwag the moon
Let us make new propellers,
Go past old spent stars
And find blue moons on a new star path

Let us make pioneer prayers
Let working clothes be sacred
Let us look on
And listen in
On God's great workshop
Of stars and eggs

There shall be—
Many many girls in a wild windy moonlight,
Many many mothers carrying babies

21

Sea sunsets, give us keepsakes
Prairie gloamings, pay us for prayers
Mountain clouds on bronze skies—
 Give us great memories
Let us have summer roses
Let us have tawny harvest haze in pumpkin time
Let us have springtime faces to toil for and play for
Let us have the fun of booming winds on long waters
Give us dreamy blue twilights—of winter evenings—to wrap us in a coat
 of dreaminess
Moonlight, come down—shine down, moonlight—meet every bird cry
 and every song calling to a hard old earth, a sweet young earth

Spring Grass

SPRING GRASS

SPRING grass, there is a dance to be danced
for you
Come up, spring grass, if only for young feet
Come up, spring grass, young feet ask you

Smell of the young spring grass,
You're a mascot riding on the wind horses
You came to my nose and spiffed me This is
your lucky year

Young spring grass just after the winter,
Shoots of the big green whisper of the year,
Come up, if only for young feet
Come up, young feet ask you

MOIST MOON PEOPLE

THE moon is able to command the valley tonight
The green mist shall go a-roaming, the white river shall
go a-roaming
Yet the moon shall be commanding, the moon shall take a
high stand on the sky
When the cats crept up the gullies,
And the goats fed at the rim a-laughing,
When the spiders swept their rooms in the burr oaks,
And the katydids first searched for this year's accordions,
And the crickets began a-looking for last year's concertinas—

I was there, I saw that hour, I know God had grand
intentions about it
If not, why did the moon command the valley, the green
mist and white river go a-roaming, and the moon by
itself take so high a stand on the sky?
If God and I alone saw it, the show was worth putting on,
Yet I remember others were there, Amos and Priscilla,
Axel and Hulda, Hank and Jo, Big Charley and
Little Morningstar,
They were all there, the clock ticks spoke with castanet
clicks

SPRING CRIES

1

CALL us back, call us with your sliding silver,
Frogs of the early spring, frogs of the later days
When spring crosses over, when spring spills over
And spills the last of its sliding silvers
Into the running wind, the running water, of summer
Call us back then, call over, call under—only call—
Frogs of the early spring, frogs of the later days

2

Birds we have seen and known and counted,
Birds we have never learned the names of,
Call us back, you too, call us back
Out of the forks and angles of branches,
High out of the blacksmith arms of oak and ash,
Sweet out of the Lombardy poplar's arrow head,
Soft out of the swinging, swaying,
The bending and almost broken branch
Of the bush of the home of the wild gooseberry—
Yellow feather, white throat, gray neck, red wing,
Scarlet head, blue shoulder, copper silver body line—
All you birds—call us back—call us under, over—
Birds we know, birds we never can know,
Birds spilling your one-two-three
Of a slur and a cry and a trill—
Call us back, you too call us.

3

Warble us easy and old ones
Open your gates up the sunset in the evening
Lift up your windows of song in the morning lights
Wind on your spiral and zigzag ways
Birds, we have heard baskets of you, bushes of you
In a tree of a hundred windows ten of you sat
On the song sills of every window
Warble us easy and old ones now
Call us back, spill your one-two-three
Of a slur and a cry and a trill

FROG SONGS

THE silver burbles of the frogs wind and swirl
The lines of their prongs swing up in a spray
They cut the air with bird line curves
The eye sees nothing, the ear is filled, the head remembers
The beat of the swirl of frog throat silver prongs
In the early springtime when eggs open, when feet learn,
When the crying of the water begins a new year

LUMBER YARD POOLS AT SUNSET

THE rain pools in the old lumber yard
change as the sky changes

No sooner do lightfoot sunset maroons
cross the west than they cross the rain
pools too

So now every blue has a brother
and every singing silver a sister

SPRING CARRIES SURPRISES

BE gay now
Shadows go fast these days
Unlocking the locks of blossoms

The lilacs never know how,
The oleanders along the old walls,
The peach trees over the hills—
Out of the lock-ups they go,
Out and crying with leaves
They never know how
Be gay—this is the time

The little keys of the climbing runners,
The opening of the doors again,
The letting loose of the shut-ins—
Here is the time—be gay now

Ask spring why
Ask in your heart why
Go around gay and foolish asking why
God be easy on your fool heart
If you don't go around asking spring
In your heart, "Why, why, why,"
 Three times like that, or else
 One long, "Why?"

Be gay now

MORE COUNTRY PEOPLE

THE six pigs at the breast of their mother
Equal six spots of young brown against a big spot of old brown
The bleating of the sheep was an arithmetic
Of the long wool coats thick after winter

The collar of white hair hung on the neck of the black hog,
The roosters of the Buff Cochins strutted

Cherry branches stuck their blossoms against the sky
Elbows joined elbows of white blossoms
Zigzags blent into a mass
"Look once at us—today is the day we call today"

SPRING WIND

Be flip with us if you want to, spring wind.
Be gay and make us sniff at your slow secrets
Be easy with us, spring wind
Be lovely and yet be lovely not too fast with us

If a child came crying out of a snowstorm
And sat down with secrets of new playthings,
Crying because lovelier things than ever came that year—

If a child came crying out of sheet ice,
A white carving of a lithe running torso,
Holding in its hands new baffling playthings—

If a child came crying so,
Wet and smiling, smelling of promises
Of yellow roses blowing in the river backwashes,
Potato blossoms across the prairie flat lands,
And even so much as one new honest song to sing—

If a child came so,
We would say, 'Come and sit on our back porch,
Listen with us and tell us more, tell us all you know,
Tell us the secrets of the spring wind,
Tell us if this is a lucky year,
Be lovely and yet be lovely not too fast with us '

CRISSCROSS

SPRING crosses over into summer
This is as it always was

Buds on the redhaw, beetles in the loam,
And the interference of the green leaves
At the blue roofs of the spring sky
Crossing over into summer—
These are ways, this is out and on
This always was

The tumble out and the push up,
The breaking of the little doors,
The look again at the mother sun,
The feel of the blue roofs over—
This is summer? This always was?

The whispering sprigs of buds stay put
The spiders are after the beetles
The farmer is driving a tractor turning furrows
The hired man drives a manure spreader
The oven bird hops in dry leaves
The woodpecker beats his tattoo
Is this it? Is spring crossing over?
Is it summer? And this always was?
The whispering pinks, the buds on the redhaw,
The blue roofs of the sky stay put

BABY SONG OF THE FOUR WINDS

LET me be your baby, south wind
Rock me, let me rock, rock me now
Rock me low, rock me warm
Let me be your baby

Comb my hair, west wind
Comb me with a cowlick
Or let me go with a pompadour.
Come on, west wind, make me your baby

North wind, shake me where I'm foolish
Shake me loose and change my ways
Cool my ears with a blue sea wind
I'm your baby, make me behave

And you, east wind, what can I ask?
A fog comfort? A fog to tuck me in?
Fix me so and let me sleep
I'm your baby—and I always was

BLOSSOM THEMES

1

LATE in the winter came one day
When there was a whiff on the wind,
a suspicion, a cry not to be heard
 of perhaps blossoms, perhaps green
 grass and clean hills lifting roll-
 ing shoulders
Does the nose get the cry of spring
 first of all? is the nose thankful
 and thrilled first of all?

2

If the blossoms come down
so they must fall on snow
because spring comes this year
before winter is gone,
then both snow and blossoms look sad,
peaches, cherries, the red summer apples,
all say it is a hard year
The wind has its own way of picking off
the smell of peach blossoms and then
carrying that smell miles and miles
 Women washing dishes in lonely farmhouses
 stand at the door and say, "Something is
 happening"
A little foam of the summer sea
 of blossoms,
 a foam finger of white leaves,
 shut these away—
 high into the summer wind runners
Let the wind be white too

SMALL HOMES

THE green bug sleeps in the white lily ear
The red bug sleeps in the white magnolia
Shiny wings, you are choosers of color
You have taken your summer bungalows wisely

Corn Belt

SHE OPENS THE BARN DOOR EVERY MORNING

OPEN the barn door, farm woman,
It is time for the cows to be milked
Their udders are full from the sleep night
Open the door with your right hand shutting a cleat,
Your left hand pulling a handle
The smell of the barn is let out to the pastures
Dawn lets itself in at the open door
A cow left out in the barnyard all the night
Looks on as though you do this every morning
Open the barn door, farm woman, you do it
As you have done it five hundred times
As a sleep woman heavy with the earth,
Clean as a milk pail washed in the sun,
You open the barn door a half mile away
And a cow almost turns its head and looks on.

MILK-WHITE MOON, PUT THE COWS TO SLEEP

MILK-WHITE moon, put the cows to sleep
Since five o'clock in the morning,
Since they stood up out of the grass,
Where they slept on their knees and hocks,
They have eaten grass and given their milk
And eaten grass again and given milk,
And kept their heads and teeth at the earth's face
Now they are looking at you, milk-white moon
Carelessly as they look at the level landscapes,
Carelessly as they look at a pail of new white milk,
They are looking at you, wondering not at all, at all,
If the moon is the skim face top of a pail of milk,
Wondering not at all, carelessly looking
Put the cows to sleep, milk-white moon,
Put the cows to sleep

SLOW PROGRAM

THE iron rails run into the sun
The setting of the sun chooses an hour
The red rail ribbons run into the red ball sun.
The ribbons and the ball change like red water lights
The picture floats with a slow program of red haze lights

FIELD PEOPLE

IN the morning eyes of the brown-eyed Susans,
in the toadflax sheaves smiling butter-and-eggs,
in the white mushrooms sprung from air into air
since yesterday morning, since yesterday evening,
in the corn row corridor walls of cornstalks—
the same southwest wind comes again, knowing—

How the field people go away,
the corn row people, the toadflax, mushroom,
thistlebloom people,

how they rise, sing songs they learn, and then go away,
leaving in the air no last will and testament at all,
leaving no last whisper at all on how this sister,
that brother, this friend, such and such a sweetheart
is remembered with a gold leaf, a cup rainbow home,
a cricket's hut for counting its summer heartbeats,
a caught shimmer of one haunted moonray to be passed on—
the running southwest wind knows them all

SUNSETS

THERE are sunsets who whisper a good-by
It is a short dusk and a way for stars
Prairie and sea rim they go level and even
And the sleep is easy

There are sunsets who dance good-by.
They fling scarves half to the arc,
To the arc then and over the arc
Ribbons at the ears, sashes at the hips,
Dancing, dancing good-by And here sleep
Tosses a little with dreams

GRASSROOTS

GRASS clutches at the dark dirt with finger holds
Let it be blue grass, barley, rye or wheat,
Let it be button weed or butter-and-eggs,
Let it be Johnny-jump-ups springing clean blue streaks
Grassroots down under put fingers into dark dirt

CANADIANS AND POTTAWATOMIES

I HAVE seen a loneliness sit
in the dark and nothing lit up
I have seen a loneliness sit

in the dark lit up like a Christ-
mas tree, a Hallowe'en pumpkin

If two Canadians understand snow
they are then both Canadians
If one Canadian understands snow
and another doesn't understand
snow at all, then one is a Canadian
and the other is no Canadian at all

The Pottawatomie Indians sang something
like this in their early winter songs.
They sang it digging holes in the ice to
let down fish-hooks, they chattered it in
the wigwams when blizzards shook the wigwams

CORN AND BEANS

HAVING looked long at two gardens rows
And seen how the rain and dirt have used them
I have decided the corn and beans shall have names

And one is to be known as the Thwarted Corn of a Short Year
While the other shall be called the Triumphant Beans of Plenty Rain

If I change these names next Sunday I shall let you know about it

MOCKERS GO TO KANSAS IN SPRING

RIDING from Topeka, Kansas, to Manhattan, Kansas,
Marco saw and heard three mockingbirds
He mentioned it to the Kansas Authors' Club
Two mockers were heard that night in Manhattan
A man from Chicago sleeping in the Gillett House
Heard one of the mockers before breakfast the morning after
This is evidence, testimony, offered in behalf of those who do not under-
stand how mockers roam north from Texas and Arkansas, sometimes
as far north as Manhattan, Kansas

BIRD TALK

AND now when the branches were beginning to be heavy,
It was the time when they once had said, "This is the
beginning of summer"

The shrilling of the frogs was not so shrill as in the
first weeks after the broken winter,

The birds took their hops and zigzags a little more
anxious, a home is a home, worms are worms

The yellow spreads of the dandelions and buttercups
reached across the green pastures

Tee whee and tee whee came on the breezes, and the grackles
chuzzled their syllables

And it was the leaves with a strong soft wind over them
that talked most of all and said more than any others
though speaking the fewest words

It was the green leaves trickling out the gaunt nowhere
of winter, out on the gray hungry branches—

It was the leaves on the branches, beginning to be heavy,
who said as they said one time before, "This is the be-
ginning of summer"

We shall never blame the birds who come
where the river and the road make the Grand Crossing
and talk there, sitting in circles talking bird talk

If they ask in their circles as to who is here
and as to who is not here and who used to be here,

Or if instead of counting up last year as against
this year, they count up this year as against next
year, and have their bird chatter about who is here
this year who won't be here next year,

We shall never blame the birds

If I have put your face among leaf faces, child,
Or if I have put your voice among bird voices,
Blame me no more than the bluejays

KANSAS LESSONS

OFTEN the mockingbird is only a mocker
singing the songs of other birds,
pouring their trills over the bushes
 And sometimes the mocker is all alone
 the child playing all-aloney all—aloney
And sometimes the mocker calls, calls, calls,
the fables, texts and cries of all heartbreaks,
all the wild nights a blood-gold moon can buy

CRICKET MARCH

As the corn becomes higher
The one shrill of a summer cricket
Becomes two and ten
With a shrilling surer than last month

As the banners of the corn
Come to their highest flying in the wind,
The summer crickets come to a marching army

SUMMER GRASS

SUMMER grass aches and whispers
It wants something, it calls and sings, it pours
 out wishes to the overhead stars

The rain hears, the rain answers, the rain is slow
 coming, the rain wets the face of the grass.

NOCTURN CABBAGE

CABBAGES catch at the moon
It is late summer, no rain, the pack of the soil
 cracks open, it is a hard summer

In the night the cabbages catch at the moon, the
leaves drip silver, the rows of cabbages are
series of little silver waterfalls in the moon

CRABAPPLES

SWEETEN these bitter wild crabapples, Illinois
October sun The roots here came from the
wilderness, came before man came here They
are bitter as the wild is bitter

Give these crabapples your softening gold,
October sun, go through to the white wet
seeds inside and soften them black Make
these bitter apples sweet They want you, sun

The drop and the fall, the drop and the fall,
the apples leaving the branches for the black
earth under, they know you from last year,
the year before last year, October sun

POPLAR AND ELM

SILVER leaves of the last of summer,
Poplar and elm silver leaves,
Leaves not least of all of the Lombardy poplar,
Standing before the autumn moon and the autumn wind
as a woman waits in a doorway for some one who
must be coming,
All you silver leaf people, you I have seen and heard
in a hundred summer winds,
It is October, it is a week, two weeks, till the rain and frost
break on us and the leaves are washed off, washed
down
In January when the trees fork gray against a clear winter
blue in the spare sun silver of winter or the lengthened
frost silver of the long nights—
I shall remember then the loans of the sun to you in June,
I shall remember the hundred winds who kissed you

BROWN GOLD

THE time of the brown gold comes softly
Oat shocks are alive in brown gold belts,
the short and the shambling oat shocks
sit on the stubble and straw
The timothy hay, the fodder corn, the cabbage
and the potatoes, across their leaves are
footsteps
There is a bold green up over the cracks in
the corn rows where the crickets go criss-
cross errands, where the bugs carry pack-
ages
Flutter and whirr, you birdies, you newcomers
in lines and sashes, tellers of harvest
weather on the way, belts of brown gold
coming softly
It is very well the old time streamers take
up the old time gold haze against the west-
ern timber line
It is the old time again when months and birds
tell each other, "Oh, very well," and repeat it
where the fields and the timber lines meet
in belts of brown gold hazes, "Oh, very
well, Oh, very well "

RIPE CORN

THE wind blows The corn leans The corn leaves go rustling The march
time and the windbeat is on October drums The stalks of fodder bend
all one way, the way the last windstorm passed

"Put on my winter clothes, get me an ulster, a yellow ulster to lay down
in January and shut my eyes and cover my ears in snow drifts "

The wind blows The corn leans The fodder is russet October says to the
leaves, "Rustle now to the last lap, to the last leg of the year "

AUBURN

AUBURN autumn leaves, will you come back?

Auburn autumn oaks, foxprints burning soft,
burning the oaken autumn coats, burning
the auburn autumn fire—

How can you burn so, how can you go on with
all this burning, and bring back more to
burn next year?

Ask and let go, lift this burning of this year
so much like last year's burning, let next
year's burning come, ask, let go

The burnings of the auburn autumn leaves, the
slow burnt foxprints of the oaken auburns,
house of leaves and branches, house of leaves
to burn and branches to be here in the
white howling, the white quiet of winter—

Going so, going so, auburn house-roof of eaves and
leaves, the child and the old man, the child and
the old woman shoot a good-by to you

The tall old man with clean bones, clean-shape toes
counting ten against the bed footboard—

This is the tall old man telling a son with clean
bones a passover auburn and oaken secret—

There are fall leaves, foxprint burnings, this year,
last year, next year, in all houses, and

Most of all in the house of the tall old man with
clean bones, clean-shape toes counting ten against
the bed footboard

In all houses are leaves burnt and burning, in all houses
branches to be here in the white howling, the patched
black quiet of winter

REDHAW RAIN

THE red rain spatter under the redhaw
tree, the hut roof branches of the red-
haw tree, the floor level loam under the

redhaw tree, the meeting place of the
fall red rain and the loam of the first
fall frost—the Pottawatomies took this
into their understanding of why October
so seldom fails, why October so often
brings the red rain spatter under the red-
haw tree

The slow rain soaks The farmers fix
wagon axles, patch the barn roof shin-
gles, peek in the thatch of the empty
swallow homes The farm wives keep to
the kitchens cleaning pans The slow
rain soaks

The head at the end of a horse's neck
holds its bone and meat, teeth and eye-
balls, tongue and ears, to the west, to
the east, to the browse of the last of
the sweetgrass range this year Snow
comes soon, out of the north, to the south
and south The tongue of the head in
the sweetgrass knows

The gray west opens for a spear of blue
longer than fifty, a hundred and fifty,
prairie miles

The gray west opens a triangle silver,
an arch of bar clouds over the prairie

And the sun washes the spear, the arch,
the triangle, over and over

WITHOUT NOTICE BEFOREHAND

THE frozen rain of the first November days
came down without notice beforehand
the same as the wind and the frost
loosening the leaves of the buckeye tree,
dropping a yellow rain of flat swirling leaves,
all without notice beforehand, came down,

the same as the far hiding out of lady bugs,
woggle bugs spotted black polka dots
on box car red, on banana yellow,
the same as this going away of the bug families
all went on without notice beforehand

Under the hedgethorn tree the bugs got together,
families from many directions, they dappled
the dark soil and made a red weather
of the Indian summer afternoon among thorns,
if a man should live a day for every bug
with a paint of box car red, a lamp shade red
on his back, a man would live many years
counting a day for a bug under the Indian summer
hedgethorn afternoon, the farmers husked their
corn in old fashioned Studebaker wagons,
the cream and gold corn ears sent a shine
between the green wagon boards, over the tops
of the green wagon boards, so the bug families
held a pow wow, making a red weather
among thorns in sun patches of Indian summer,
it seemed to be all in a bug family lifetime
coming as it did with no warnings ahead,
no shadow line to tell how soon or late
the frozen rain of the first November days,
coming without notice beforehand

The buckeye built itself a house of gold and black,
the green leaf roof, the green leaf walls of summer
belted their eaves with bucklers of gold,
changed their arches and let the rich glooms
of the black inside rafters play out,
the shine was loam crossing its heart with gold,
the running out of russet and cream yellow
on the loam black of the forks of the branches
was a sign of summer people leaving
the house the buckeye built itself, and this too
came with no warnings ahead, no shadow line
of the frozen rain of the first November days
coming without notice beforehand

CORN PRATTLINGS

THE wind came across the corn laughing
It was late in summer, the limit of summer,
The deadline of early fall time,
And the wind in the laughing corn,
The wind came across

The wind ran on the tops of the corntassels,
And the pointed long leaves hung over,
Hands obedient to the wind
And the wind ran once and again for each leaf,
Each pointed long leaf, the wind sang running
Across the corntassels and leaves of corn

There is a floor the corn grows on,
The roots of the corn go under and twist and hold
The trunk of the corn stands over the floor,
The leaf and the corntassel signal our winds
And take notice of the path of the sun

The ears laugh in the husks now
The big job of the year is done
It's all over again till next year
Out of maroon silk and fading greens,
Up over the wandering pumpkin stems,
The yellow and gold kernels laugh
The big job is over and the laugh of the yellow ears
And the laugh of the running wind go together
They come across together now late, late, in summer
Early in the fall time of the corntassels

HAZE GOLD

SUN, you may send your haze gold
Filling the fall afternoon
With a flimmer of many gold feathers
Leaves, you may linger in the fall sunset

Like late lingering butterflies before frost
Treetops, you may sift the sunset cross-lights
Spreading a loose checkerwork of gold and shadow
Winter comes soon—shall we save this, lay it by,
Keep all we can of these haze gold yellows?

WINTER GOLD

THE same gold of summer was on the winter hills,
the oat straw gold, the gold of slow sun change

The stubble was chilly and lonesome,
the stub feet clomb up the hills and stood

The flat cry of one wheeling crow faded and came,
ran on the stub gold flats and faded and came

Fade-me, find-me, slow lights rang their changes
on the flats of oat straw gold on winter hills

MAROON WITH SILVER FROST

WHISPERS of maroon came on the little river.
The slashed hill took up the sunset,
Took up the evening star
The brambles crackled in a fire call
To the beginnings of frost
“It is almost night,” the maroon whispered
 in widening blood rings on the little river
“It is night,” the sunset, the evening star
 said later over the hump of the slashed hill
“What if it is?” the brambles crackled across
 the sure silver beginnings of frost

CORNFIELD RIDGE AND STREAM

THE top of the ridge is a cornfield
It rests all winter under snow
It feeds the broken snowdrifts in spring

To a clear stream cutting down hill to the river
Late in summer the stream dries, rabbits run and
birds hop along the dry mud bottom
Fall time comes and it fills with leaves, oaks and
shagbark hickories drop their summer hats,
ribbons, handkerchiefs
"This is how I keep warm all winter," the stream
murmurs, waiting till the snowdrifts melt and
the ice loosens and the clear singing babble
of spring comes back

ON A RAILROAD RIGHT OF WAY

STREAM, go hide yourself
In the tall grass, in the cat-tails,
In the browns of autumn, the last purple
asters, the yellow whispers
On the moss rock levels leave the marks
of your wave-lengths
Sing in your gravel, in your clean gully
Let the moaning railroad trains go by.
Till they stop you, go on with your song

The minnies spin in the water gravel,
In the spears of the early autumn sun.
There must be winter fish
Babies, you will be jumping fish
In the first snow month

SO TO SPEAK

DREAMS, graves, pools, growing
flowers, cornfields—these are
silent, so to speak

Northwest blizzards, sea rocks
apounding in high wind, southeast
sleet after a thaw—these are heard,
so to speak

Valley Mist

SILVER POINT

THE silver point of an evening star
dropping toward the hammock of new moon
over Lake Okoboji, over prairie waters in Iowa,—
it was framed in the lights just after twilight

MIST MARCHES ACROSS THE VALLEY

MIST marches across the valley
Down a long slope the mist marches
And then up a long slope the mist marches
And kingdoms, armies, guns, magic of bookmen, axmen,
The mist marches through them all, gathers them all
And goes to the next valley, goes to the next night,
Goes to the next lookers-on, gathers them all,
Gathers valleys, nights, lookers-on

Come on down the valley come on, oh mist
Whiten us with some of your white
Show us your gift, your great gift, your white gift
Of gathering all, gathering kingdoms, armies, guns,
Magic of bookmen, axmen, gathering valleys, nights, lookers-on
Whiten us, oh mist, whiten us with some of this strong soft white of
yours

METHUSALEH SAW MANY REPEATERS

METHUSALEH was a witness to many cabbages and kings,
Many widows of the sod and many grass widows,
Many a mother-in-law, many a triangle of one woman and two men or
one man and two women,

Many who died hungry and crying for their babies, many who died
hungry and no babies at all to cry for

Methusaleh must have lived eight hundred years or a thousand or two
hundred years

Methusaleh was an old man when he died and you if you see what
Methusaleh saw,

You will be an old man or an old woman when you die

Repeat it Methusaleh saw many cabbages and kings, he was a witness,
a looker-on like me, like you

Repeat it Methusaleh was an old man, he saw much before he was
through, and you or I, if we see what Methusaleh saw, if we see it
all before we are through,

You and I will be old, old as Methusaleh, old with our looking on at
cabbages and kings, widows of the sod and the grass, triangles, and
people with babies to cry for and no babies at all to cry for

Repeat it Methusaleh was a witness of repeating figures, sea patterns in
the sea sand, land patterns of the land wind, Methusaleh was a wit-
ness, a looker-on like me, like you

SKETCH OF A POET

He wastes time walking and telling the air, "I am superior even to the
wind"

On several proud days he has addressed the wide circumambient atmos-
phere, "I am the wind myself"

He has poet's license 4-11-44, he got it even before writing of those "silver
bugs that come on the sky without warning every evening"

He stops for the buzzing of bumblebees on bright Tuesdays in any
summer month, he performs with a pencil all alone among dun cat-
tails, amid climbing juniper bushes, notations rivaling the foot tracks of
anxious spiders, he finds mice homes under beach logs in the sand and
pursues inquiries on how the mice have one room for bed-room, dining-
room, sitting-room and how they have no front porch where they sit pub-
licly and watch passers-by

He asks himself, "Who else is the emperor of such elegant english? Who else has slipped so often on perilous banana peels and yet lived to put praise of banana peels on sonorous pages?"

One minute he accuses God of having started the world on a shoestring, the next minute he executes a simple twist of the wrist and a slight motion of the hand and insinuates these bones shall rise again

Yet he wastes time walking and telling the air, "I am superior to the wind," or on proud days, "I am the wind myself"

WHIFFS OF THE OHIO RIVER AT CINCINNATI

1

A young thing in spring green slippers, stockings,
silk vivid as lilac-time grass,
And a red line of a flaunt of fresh silk again up under
her chin—
She slipped along the street at half-past six in the evening,
came out of the stairway where her street address is,
where she has a telephone number—
Just a couple of blocks from the street next to the
Ohio river, where men sit in chairs tipped back,
watching the evening lights on the water of the
Ohio river—
She started out for the evening, dark brown calf eyes,
roaming and hunted eyes,
And her young wild ways were not so young any more,
nor so wild

Another evening primrose stood in a stairway, with a
white knit sweater fitting her shoulders and ribs close
She asked a young ballplayer passing for a few kind words
and a pleasant look—and he slouched up to her like an
umpire calling a runner out at the home plate—he
gave her a few words and passed on
She had bells on, she was jingling, and yet—her young
wild ways were not so young any more, nor so wild

2

When I asked for fish in the restaurant facing the Ohio river, with fish signs and fish pictures all over the wooden, crooked frame of the fish shack, the young man said, "Come around next Friday—the fish is all gone today"

So, I took eggs, fried, straight up, one side, and he murmured, humming, looking out at the shining breast of the Ohio river, "And the next is something else, and the next is something else"

The customer next was a hoarse roustabout, handling nail kegs on a steamboat all day, asking for three eggs, sunny side up, three, nothing less, shake us a mean pan of eggs

And while we sat eating eggs, looking at the shining breast of the Ohio river in the evening lights, he had his thoughts and I had mine thinking how the French who found the Ohio river named it La Belle Riviere meaning a woman easy to look at.

SUBURBAN SICILIAN SKETCHES

1

THE cockleburs came on the burdocks,
a little of thistle, a little of flower,
a light red purple tip on raw green bur

The burdocks came like hoodlums come,
they came with neither permits nor requests,
they took what they wanted "If anybody
asks you, this is us, and we are here because
we decided to come to the party—we invited
ourselves and we are welcome"

Listen in the summer when the roots dig in,
the hoodlum roots of the burdock gangs,
what each one sings is much like—
"I'm gonna live anyhow until I die"

In the time of the turning leaves
the light red purple tip and the raw green bur
pass and turn to a brown, to a drab and dirty brown

2

In Mel-a-rose among the sons of Sicily
I saw a sheep, a dirty undersized sheep,
In the front yard cabbage patch of a son of Sicily,
And the wool of the sheep had never been combed,
The wool of the sheep was snarled and knotted
And the burdock gang was there,
Burs in the wool with a drab and hoodlum mutter,
'This is us, we invited ourselves and we're welcome'

3

The sober-faced goat crops grass next to the sidewalk
A clinking chain connects the collar of the goat with a steel pin driven
in the ground
Next to the sidewalk the goat crops November grass,
Pauses seldom, halts not at all, incessantly goes after grass

4

The playhouse of the Sicilian children
thatched with maple branches their father
threw over for a roof in summer,
the playhouse roof is dry,
It sags and crackles in the west wind

5

The Sicilian father is tying cornstalks
for a winter vest at the roots of the young apple tree
This, and the red peppers drying on the cellar door,
this is one of the signs of November

FLAT WATERS OF THE WEST IN KANSAS

AFTER the sunset in the mountains
there are shadows and shoulders
standing to the stars
After the sunset on the prairie
there are only the stars,
the stars standing alone.

The flat waters of the west in Kansas
take up the sunset lights
one by one and all—
the bars, the barriers, the slow-down,
the loose lasso handy on the saddle,
the big hats, the slip-knot handkerchiefs,
the cattle horns, the hocks and haunches
ready for the kneel-down, the sleep
of the humps and heads in the grass,
the pony with a rump to the wind
or curving a neck to a front foot—
if a baby moon comes after the sunset
it is a witness of many homes,
many home-makers under the night sky-shed—
and the flat waters of the west in Kansas
take up the baby moon, the witness,
take it and let it ride,
take it and let it have a home

The great plains
gave the buffalo grass

The great plains
gave the buffalo grass

THREE SLANTS AT NEW YORK

NEW YORK is a city of many cats
Some say New York is Babylon
There is a rose and gold must New York.

New York is a city of many cats, they eat the swill of the poor and the swell swill, they rub their backs against fire escapes and weep to each other from alley barrels, they are born to the cat life of New York

Some say New York is Babylon, here are Babylonian dancers stripped to the flash of the navel, while the waiters murmur, "Yes," in undertones to regular customers calling for the same whiskey as last time, and having seen a thing of much preparation, toil and genius, having spoken to each

other of how marvelous it is, they eat and drink till it is forgotten, and the topics are easy topics, such as which bootleggers take the biggest risks, and what light risks superior bootleggers travel under

There is a rose and gold New York of evening lights and sunsets, there is a mist New York seen from steamboats, a massed and spotted hovering ghost, a shape the fists of men have lifted out of dirt and work and daylight and early morning oaths after sleep nights

New York is a city of many cats
Some say New York is Babylon
There is a rose and gold mist New York

LANDSCAPE INCLUDING THREE STATES OF THE UNION

THE mountains stand up around the main street in Harper's Ferry
Shadows stand around the town, and mist creeps up the flanks of tall
rocks
A terrible push of waters sometime made a cloven way for their flood
here
On the main street the houses huddle, the walls crouch for cover
And yet—up at Hilltop House, or up on Jefferson's Rock, there are
lookouts,
There are the long curves of the meeting of the Potomac and the
Shenandoah,
There is the running water home of living fish and silver of the sun
The lazy flat rocks spread out browns for green and blue silver to run
over
Mascots of silver circles move around Harper's Ferry
No wonder John Brown came here to fight and be hanged
No wonder Thomas Jefferson came here to sit with his proud red head
writing notes on the great State of Virginia
Borders hem the town, borders of Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland,
Be absent minded a minute or two and you guess at what state you
are in
Harper's Ferry is a meeting place of winds and waters, rocks and ranges

CROSSING OHIO WHEN POPPIES BLOOM IN ASHTABULA

1

Go away Leave the high winds of May
blowing over the fields of grape vines
near the northwest corner of Pennsylvania
Leave the doorstep peonies
pushing high bosoms at passers-by
in northern Ohio towns in May

Leave the boys flying light blue kites
on a deep blue sky, and the yellow, the
yellow spilling over the drinking rims
of the buttercups, piling their yellows
into foam blown sea rims of yellow,
Go away, go to New York,
Broadway, Fifth Avenue, glass
lights and leaves, glass faces,
fingers, go

2

Pick me poppies in Ohio,
mother
Pick me poppies in a back yard
in Ashtabula

May going, poppies coming, summer humming
make it a poppy summer, mother, the leaves
sing in the silk, the leaves sing a tawny
red gold, seven sunsets saved themselves
to be here now

Pick me poppies, mother, go, May, wash me,
summer, shoot up this back yard in Ashta-
bula, shoot it up, give us a daylight fire-
works in Ohio, burn it up with tawny red
gold

MARCH OF THE HUNGRY MOUNTAINS

ACROSS Nevada and Utah
Look for the march of the hungry mountains

They are cold and white,
They are taking a rest,
They washed their faces in awful fires,
They lifted their heads for heavy snows

White, O white, are the vapors,
And the wind in the early morning,
White are the hungry mountains

The tireless gray desert,
The tireless salt sea,
The tireless mountains,
They are thinking over something
They are wondering, "What next?"
They are thankful, thinking it over,
Waiting, sleeping, drying their faces from awful fires,
Lifting their heads into higher snow,
White in the early morning wind

"Come and listen to us,"
Said the marching, hungry mountains
"You will hear nothing at all,
And you will learn only a little,
And, yet listening, your ears may grow longer and softer,
You may yet have long, clear, listening ears
Come and listen," said the mocking, hungry mountains

DIALOGUE

LAKE MICHIGAN We have been here quite a while
ILLINOIS PRAIRIE Maybe
LAKE We have seen ten cities
PRAIRIE. Eleven
LAKE Eleven with Chicago

SMOKE BLUE

THE mountains stood on their bottom ends,
the smoky mountains stood around in blue,
the blue mountains stood around in smoke,

The higher the line of the burnt timber climbed,
the lower the line of the green timber crept,
the creep of the burnt and the green
was a couple of shadows moving through each other

The farms and the fences came,
And the farmers fixing fences
The snake rail fences measured the farms,
Hog tight, horse high, they held for the owners
The hogs for hams and the horses for hauls

The farms came to the valley,
And the mountains stood on their bottom ends,
The mountains stood in a smoke and a blue

The cities came, the lumber wagons,
The lumber carpenters, the lathers, the plasterers,
The bricklayers came in their overalls,
And the hod-carriers up and down the ladders with mortar
And the bricklayers calling down to the hod-carriers,
"Mort!"

And the concrete mixers came with their endless bellies
For sand and crushed stone and gravel and cement,
The cities came, stood up, and swore, "This is us, by God"
The cities, the families, the tall two-fisted men, swearing,
"This is us, by God, this is God's country"

The boomers boomed the boosters,
The boosters boosted the boomers

And the mountains stood on their bottom ends,
The mountains stood in a smoke and a blue.

AGAIN?

OLD MAN WOOLWORTH put up a building
There it was, his dream, all true,
The biggest building in the world
Babel, the Nineveh Hanging Gardens,
Karnak, all old, outclassed
And now, here at last, what of it?
What about it? Well, every morning
We'll walk around it and look up
And every morning we'll ask what
It means and where it's going
It's a dream, all true, going somewhere,
That's a cinch, women buying mousetraps,
Wire cloth dishrags, ten cent sheet music,
They paid for it, the electric tower
Might yell an electric sign to the inbound
Ocean liners, 'Look what the washerwomen
Of America can do with their nickels,' or
'See what a nickel and a dime can do,'
And that wouldn't clear Old Man Woolworth's
Head, it was a mystery, a dream, the biggest
Building in the world, Babel, the Nineveh
Hanging Gardens, Karnak, all old,
Outclassed So the old man cashes in,
The will of the old man is dug out,
And the widow gets thirty million dollars,
Enough to put up another building,
Another bigger than any in the world,
Bigger than Babel, the Nineveh Hanging Gardens,
Karnak, another mystery, another dream
To stand and look up at
And ask what it means.

EVEN NUMBERS

1

A HOUSE like a man all lean and coughing,
a man with his two hands in the air at a cry,
"Hands up "

A house like a woman shrunken and stoop-shouldered,
shrunken and done with dishes and dances

These two houses I saw going uphill in Cincinnati

2

Two houses leaning against each other like drunken
brothers at a funeral,

Two houses facing each other like two blind wrestlers
hunting a hold on each other,

These four scrawny houses I saw on a dead level
cinder patch in Scranton, Pennsylvania

3

And by the light of a white moon in Waukesha, Wisconsin,
I saw a lattice work in lilac time white-mist lavender
a sweet moonlit lavender

CHILLICOTHE

THERE was a man walked out
Of a house in Chillicothe, Ohio,—
Or the house was in Chillicothe, Illinois,
Or again in Chillicothe, Missouri,—

And the man said to himself,
Speaking as men speak their thoughts
To themselves after a funeral or a wedding,
After seeing a baby born with raw, red toes

And the toe-nails pink as the leaves of fresh flowers,
Or after seeing a kinsman try to hold on
To the fading door-frames of life
And then languish, let go, and sleep,—

Speaking his own thoughts,
Or what he believed in so far as he knew
To be thoughts peculiar to himself alone,
At that hour of time, under the clocks and suns,
He said, and to himself

“I have never seen myself live a day
I have told myself I get up in the morning,
I wash my face, I reach for a towel, I find a razor,
I shave off a day- or a two-day growth of whiskers
I look in the looking-glass and say,
‘Birdie, whither away today?’ or I say,
‘You old hound dog, are you on to yourself?’ or
‘What’s in the wind for this evening?’ or,
‘Who put the fish in efficiency?’ or,
‘What packages will be handed us this morning?’

“Yes, I stand in front of the looking-glass,
And while I am shaving I sometimes ask questions
Exactly as though the house I am shaving in
Is a wagon crossing Oklahoma looking for a home,
Or a steamboat on the tossing salt, two days from Sandy
Hook,

Or a Pullman sleeper crossing the divide in Colorado—
This must be why I say to the looking-glass,
‘You are the same when I am shaving, always,
Whether we are in Oklahoma, off Sandy Hook,
Or hitting the high spot of the Colorado divide,
Your business as a looking-glass is to say ‘Me, too,’
‘Here it is,’ ‘Here you are,’ ‘I don’t want to tell you no lie
If I tell a lie, I lose out as a looking-glass’

“There are hinged elbows of arms, sockets in shoulder-
bones
And out beyond the elbows are finger-bones, finger-ends

And after a while the command runs out to the finger-ends
To wipe off the lather, throw a hot towel, witch hazel,
Then dry smooth the face, talcum, and call it a once over
This action finished, I can testify all day, 'I shaved this
morning'

Or if there is a murder or a robbery, and I am called as a
witness

In the matter of an identity or an alibi or *corpus delicti*,
I can solemnly swear at this hour I shaved my face, at this
hour

I commanded the members and parts of my body in these
performances

I shaved this morning

"Yet all this is only a whiff, a little comic beginning
Ever since I have owned more than one shirt
I have had to decide which shirt to wear today
There was a year when I had only one shirt,
And even then I had to decide whether I would wear that
one shirt

Or whether I would get along with no shirt at all
Now, having six shirts, I must pick one and let five others
go

If there are buttons off the shirt, I decide
How many new buttons go on

"Decisions—see? It is early in the day, it is not a half-hour
Since I was in the sheets of unremembering slumber
Yet the day's decisions have mounted steadily as the climb
of the sun

Up and on across the elements of the sky

"Yes? Quite so And sure, Mike
These things count for nothing much
There is no special destiny about them
They are different from falling in love
Or calling up a doctor to tie an artery
Or writing a lawyer about a bastardy case,
Or telling a panhandler you are broke yourself,
And do your shopping by looking in the show-windows

"Yes, they are all different
Yet they all connect up with civilization
Or tombs and ramparts earlier than civilization
So God help your soul when you get tired of them and say
'I want something new I want two and two to be five I want a miracle
to happen, miracles now and henceforth I want the light that never
was on land or sea' "

And all the time it is the same man speaking,
The same man who walked out of his house
In Chillicothe, Ohio, Chillicothe, Illinois, or Chillicothe,
Missouri,
It is the same man speaking his own thoughts,
As if thoughts come to him and belong to him alone,
And as though it is useless to pass them on—
It is the same man speaking

"I have never seen myself live a day
I have pulled up a chair to the breakfast table
And watched children tuck napkins under their chin,
Spill the yellow of eggs down their bibs,
Clean their plates, lick their spoons, call for more to eat,
While they banged their spoons and bowls on the table
And went on yammering for more to eat
I have seen them use their tongues as cats and dogs
Employ their tongues, as utensils, conveniences,
With laughter shining in their eyes
And when they began talking, they lied to each other,
They lied with an importance of falsifying large
They broke out with impossible propositions
They acted as though they live in a republic of separate
laws,
Under a government whose laws go deeper than the speech
Of people expert and renowned for their ways of speech
Their laughter ran as the water of waterfalls runs

"They were so proud, so sure, in all their ways, I said
'What goes? What drops off? What is the sheath they lose
When they grow up and get big and leave behind them
Their republic of separate laws,

Their government of laws deeper than speech,
Their civilization of impossible propositions?
Why shall they seem no longer so proud, so sure,
With laughter running as the water of waterfalls runs?

"I ask myself just that question
I asked it far inside of myself
And it was such a far-off question, if I had whispered it
They would have known it was not to be answered "

And this was only one morning
Among the many mornings of that man
Speaking to himself what he considered his own thoughts
Going out of the door of his house in Chillicothe

And these are only a few of the thoughts of that one morning
For, when he reached the gate and stepped to the sidewalk,
He said again to himself

"I have never seen myself live a day"

SPLINTER

THE voice of the last cricket
across the first frost
is one kind of good-by
It is so thin a splinter of singing

SANTA FE SKETCHES

1

THE valley was swept with a blue broom to the west.

And to the west, on the fringes of a mesa sunset,
there are blue broom leavings, hangover blue wisps—
bluer than the blue floor the broom touched
before and after it caught the blue sweepings

The valley was swept with a blue broom to the west

2

When a city picks a valley—and a valley picks a city—
it is a marriage—and there are children

Since the bluebirds come by twenties
and the blackbirds come by forties
in March, when the snow skirls in a sunshine wind,
since they come up the valley to the city, heading north,
it is taken as a testimony of witnesses

When the bluebird barriers drop,
when the redwing bars go down,
the flurries of sun flash now on the tail feathers—
it is up the valley—up and on—
by twenties and forties—
and the tail feathers flashing

In the cuts of the red dirt arroyos,
at the change of the mist of the mountain waterfalls,
in cedars and piñons, at the scars and gashes,
at the patches where new corn will be planted,
at the Little Canyon of the Beans,
they stop and count how far they have come,
the twenties and forties stop and count

Whoever expected them to remember,
to carry little pencils between their toes,
notebooks under their wings?
By twenties, by forties—it is enough,
“When wings come, and sun, and a new wind
out of the Southwest whispering—
and especially wings—we forget—
we forget”

They saw Navajos ride with spears and arrows,
Spaniards ride with blunderbusses,
cowboys ride with Colts and Winchesters—
they saw the changing shooting irons—
and now the touring-car and flivver
creep up the red dirt valley, among the rabbit bushes,

passing the clean-piled clean-cut woodpiles
on the backs of mountain-born burros

3

The valley sits with its thoughts

"Have I not had my thoughts by myself
four hundred years?" she asks

"Have I not seen the guns of Spain, Mexico
and America go up and down the valley?

"Is not holy faith and the name of a saint
in my name?

"Was I not called La Villa de Sante Fé de
San Francisco de Assisi?

"Do they not name a railroad from Chicago
to Los Angeles after me?

"Did they not give a two-thousand-mile wagon
trail of the first gold diggers, the forty-niners,
my name, the short pet name, Santa Fé?

"Do you wonder I sit here, like an easy woman,
not young, not old—
Do you wonder I sit here, shrewd, faded, asking
What next? who next?
And answering my own questions I don't care—
let the years worry "

4

By twenties and forties,
the bluebirds and the redwings,
out of the bars, the barners,
in a flash of tail feathers
on and up the valley—

"When wings come
and the Southwest whispering,
we forget."

5

The valley city sits among its brooding facts,
"Six years ago—only ponies, bridles, saddles circled
around the public square, the plaza, the place of the
Summer band concerts—
And now—the varnished motor-cars stand with funeral
faces filling the old pony hitching places

"I have seen candles keep the night watch till the coal
oil came and then the live wires—
Thirty miles away the mountain villages see two strings
of lights hung like Summer flies—the penitentiary night
lights of Santa Fé

"The fast travelers with extra tires come in a hurry
and solve me and pass on to say all their lives,
'Santa Fé' oh yes, Santa Fé, I have seen Santa Fé'
'Hurry up,' is their first and last word on my zigzag
streets, my lazy 'dobe corners
'Hurry up, we must see the Old Church, the Old Bell, the
Oldest House in the United States, touch the doors,
and then go on—hurry up!

"They are afraid grass will grow under their feet—they
say so as a proverb—
And I am afraid they will knock loose some cool green
whisper of moss in a chink of a wall "

6

In April the little farmers go out in the foothills,
up the mountain patches
They go to gamble against the weather, the rain

"If the rain comes like last year, we shall have a fat
winter,
If the rain comes like year before last, it is a lean
Christmas for us "

They put in their beans, the magic frijole, the chile,
they stretch open hands to the sky,
and tell the rain to come,
to come, come, come

With a willing rain the gamblers win
If the rain says, "Not this year," they lose

So the little farmers go out in the foothills,
up the mountain patches in April,
telling every bean in the sack
to send up a wish to God
for water to come . . . out of the sky.

7

A loose and changeable sky
looks on a loose and changeable land

The rain rips the wagon road ruts
too deep for wheels—the wagons make a new road,
the rain makes a new little arroyo
Pack burros tussling under bundled woodpiles go by
with eyes murmuring, "Everything is the same as it
always was"
The tough little tussling foot of a burro, the wag of
a left ear to a right ear, are they joking, "Every-
thing is the same as it always was?"

8

Proud and lazy Spaniards with your pearl swords
of conquest, your blunderbuss guns of flags and
victory—
Who did you conquer and fasten down as your vassals?

The blood is dry and mixed in a mixing-bowl
The passion kiss and the sunlit blaze of the Indian woman's eye—the
faces and the hair of Spain and the Aztecs, Moors and the Navajos—
are mixed in a mixing-bowl—and a passer-by writes—

"In Mexico nobody knows how to sing
and everybody sings"

Come back and pick up your pearl-handled swords,
your blunderbuss guns
Sniff with the tourists in the Santa Fé Museum—

See them look at their stop-watches—

“A little gas now—and we’re on our way—come on
kid—on your way ”

9

The valley was swept with a blue broom to the west,
there are blue broom leavings on the sky,
hangover blue wisps

The valley city sits with its thoughts

“Have I not had my thoughts by myself
four hundred years?” she asks

“Do you wonder I sit here, shrewd, faded,
asking What next? who next?

And answering I don’t care—let the
years worry ”

10

By twenties and forties,
the bluebirds and the redwings,
out of the bars, the barners,
in a flash of tail feathers
on and up the valley—
“When wings come
and the Southwest whispering,
we forget ”

Little Album

NEW HAMPSHIRE AGAIN

I REMEMBER black winter waters,
I remember thin white birches,
I remember sleepy twilight hills,

I remember riding across New
Hampshire lengthways
I remember a station named
"Halcyon," a brakeman call-
ing to passengers "Halcyon!"
Halcyon!"
I remember having heard the
gold diggers dig out only
enough for wedding rings
I remember a stately child tell-
ing me her father gets letters
addressed "Robert Frost, New
Hampshire"
I remember an old Irish saying,
"His face is like a fiddle and
every one who sees him must
love him"
I have one remember, two re-
members, ten remembers, I
have a little handkerchief
bundle of remembers

One early evening star just over
a cradle moon,
One dark river with a spatter of
later stars caught,
One funnel of a motorcar head-
light up a hill,
One team of horses hauling a
bobsled load of wood,
One boy on skis picking himself
up after a tumble—
I remember one and a one and a
one riding across New Hamp-
shire lengthways I have a lit-
tle handkerchief bundle of re-
members

A COUPLE

HE was in Cincinnati, she in Burlington
He was in a gang of Postal Telegraph linemen
She was a pot rasser in a boarding house
"The crying is lonely," she wrote him
"The same here," he answered
The winter went by and he came back and they married
And he went away again where rainstorms knocked down telegraph
poles and wires dropped with frozen sleet
And again she wrote him, "The crying is lonely"
And again he answered, "The same here"
Their five children are in the public schools
He votes the Republican ticket and is a taxpayer
They are known among those who know them
As honest American citizens living honest lives
Many things that bother other people never bother them
They have their five children and they are a couple,
A pair of birds that call to each other and satisfy
As sure as he goes away she writes him, "The crying is
lonely"
And he flashes back the old answer, "The same here"
It is a long time since he was a gang lineman at Cincinnati
And she was a pot rasser in a Burlington boarding house,
Yet they never get tired of each other, they are a couple

CHICAGO BOY BABY

THE baby picked from an ash barrel by the night police
came to the hospital of the Franciscan brothers
in a diaper and a white sheet

It was a windy night in October, leaves and geese scurrying
across the north sky, and the curb pigeons more ravenous
than ever for city corn in the cracks of the street stones

The two policemen who picked the baby from the ash barrel
are grayheads, they talk about going on the pension list

soon, they talk about whether the baby, surely a big man
now, votes this year for Smith or Hoover

JOKE GOLD

It arose with him as a joke,
His saying so often with a mystical gesture
Known to all as a joke,
"There's gold in them hills, Jack"
All of us laughed and he laughed most
At the comic illusion of gold hunters
Picking hills to gamble in, with
Hopes and shovels, burros and frying pans,
The yellow shine of the high lure
Overlying life's high points
It was all there in his sudden interjection,
"There's gold in them hills, Jack"
His wife, his other women, his new jobs
One after the other, his swaggering neckties,
Sport shirts, and allusions to men with fat
Checkbooks he lunched with chummily,
It all tied in with his always saying
Gold lay in hills beyond, joke gold
In joke hills to be made into real gold
In real hills for wishing, for only enough
Wishing—it was all in his voice when he
Went away and was never heard from again,
Stepping on the outbound train west
Saying, "Gold in them hills, Jack"

THE OLD FLAGMAN

THE old flagman has great-grandchildren
Ruddy as a hard nut, hair in his ears, clear sea lights in his eyes,
He goes out of his shanty and lifts a sign Stop

"Y'see where the sign is dented?
I hit a fellah over the head with it,

The only way to stop him gettin' run over
They want to get killed, I have to stop 'em
That's my job "

He was twenty years a policeman in Chicago
"I carry a bullet in my guts an I got an abscess in my gall bladder—
I picked this shanty for a rest
I go slow and careful, I got a leak in the heart, if
I laugh too hard my heart stops—and I fall down,
I have to watch myself "

A third rail car hoots up the line
He goes out with a warning in his hand Stop
"These damn fools, they want to get under the wheels
I have to stop 'em "

Ruddy as a hard nut, hair in his ears, clear sea lights in his eyes

IGLITS AND HIS WIFE

IGLITS' wife spoke of her own novel, of a Norwegian's novel and came finally to speak of Whimsley and Whimsley's wife and egg spots on the wallpaper and fly specks on the new white kalsomining of the sleeping room of Whimsley and Whimsley's wife

Iglits' wife went on patching a picture together in clean polite language, hearsay and circumstance

The cool abstraction of the scientist, the mocking sleight-of-hand passes of the artist, the galloping babble of the gossip who mixes names and dates for the sake of the story and only asks a laugh or a giggle before going on to another laugh—

These were lost in the list of witnesses ready to testify to the egg spots on the wallpaper, the fly specks on the new white kalso-mining of the sleeping room of Whimsley and Whimsley's wife
Iglits mentions the weather to the housemaid serving washed apricots for breakfast, mentions letters and filing devices to the stenographer in the downtown office.

Iglits buys whiskey from two booze runners, a bottle is in his desk always, Iglits says he wants to be lit up a little every day

MEDLEY

IGNORANCE came in stones of gold,
The ignorant slept while the hangmen
Hanged the keepers of the lights
Of sweet stars such were the apothegms,
Offhand offerings of mule-drivers
Eating sandwiches of rye bread,
Salami and onions

"Too Many Books," we always called him,
A landscape of masterpieces and old favorites
Fished with their titles for his eyes
In the upstairs and downstairs rooms
Of his house Whenever he passed
The old-time bar-room where Pete Morehouse
Shot the chief of police, where
The sponge squads shot two bootleggers,
He always remembered the verse story,
The Face on the Bar-room Floor—
The tramp on a winter night,
Saddened and warmed with whiskey,
Telling of a woman he wanted
And a woman who wanted him,
How whiskey wrecked it all,
Taking a piece of chalk,
Picturing her face on the bar-room floor,
Fixing the lines of her face
While he told the story,
Then gasping and falling with finished heartbeats,
Dead

And whenever he passed over the bridge at night
And took the look up the river to smaller bridges,
Barge lights, and looming shores,
He always thought of Edgar Allan Poe,
With a load of hootch in him,
Going to a party of respectable people
Who called for a speech,

Who listened to Poe recite the Lord's Prayer,
Correctly, word for word, yet with lush, unmistakable
Intonations, so haunting the dinner-party people
All excused themselves to each other

Whenever Too Many Books
Passed over the town bridge in the gloaming,
He thought of Poe breaking up that party
Of respectable people Such was Too Many Books—
We called him that

IMPLICATIONS

WHEN the charge of election bribery was brought against an Illinois senator, he replied, "I read the Bible and believe it from cover to cover"

When his accusers specified five hundred dollars of corruption money was paid in a St Louis hotel bathroom, his friends answered, "He is faithful to his wife and always kind to his children"

When he was ousted from the national senate and the doors of his bank were closed by government receivers and a grand jury indicted him, he took the vows of an old established church

When a jury acquitted him of guilt as a bank wrecker, following the testimony of prominent citizens that he was an honest man, he issued a statement to the public for the newspapers, proclaiming he knew beforehand no jury would darken the future of an honest man with an unjust verdict

TO THE GHOST OF JOHN MILTON

IF I should pamphleteer twenty years against royalists,
With rewards offered for my capture dead or alive,
And jails and scaffolds always near,

And then my wife should die and three ignorant daughters
Should talk about their father as a joke, and steal the
Earnings of books, and the poorhouse always reaching for
me,

If I then lost my eyes and the world was all dark and I
Sat with only memories and talk—

I would write "Paradise Lost," I would marry a second wife
And on her dying I would marry a third pair of eyes to
Serve my blind eyes, I would write "Paradise Regained," I
Would write wild, foggy, smoky, wordy books—

I would sit by the fire and dream of hell and heaven,
Idiots and kings, women my eyes could never look on again,
And God Himself and the rebels God threw into hell

HEAVY AND LIGHT

AND you, old woman, are carrying scrub buckets tonight
Just like last year, just like the year before,
Every Saturday night you come gripping the handles,
Throwing the suds, cleaning this room's floor
They call you "Mrs Swanson," your hair is thin and gray,
It is a lean little wiry frame you move in
In your eyes you are ready for whatever comes next
Your sons have scrubbed ship decks, an uncle somewhere
Stood at a wheel in a Baltic storm—why must there be
Some rag of romance, some slant of a scarlet star
Over and around your scrub buckets?

Fritters used to say, "There is poetry in neckties"
He picked neckties with a theory of color and design
He knew haberdashers the way book bugs know where second-hand book-
stores are
For a picnic he wore pink, for a fall fog day a gray blue,
And a four-in-hand, a bow, a bat-eye, each in its separate individual silk,
plain or striped or spotted,
Each had its message, its poem, its reminders, for Fritters
"I know how to pick 'em," he used to say, "I know the right scarf for
either a wedding or a funeral or a poker party, there is poetry in
neckties"

EARLY HOURS

(T o A W F)

SINCE you packed your rubber bottom boots
 And took the night train for northern Wisconsin
 To hunt deer in the ten days allowed by law,
 I have remembered your saying the hunters
 Get up out of bed and dress for shooting,
 For reading snow tracks, circling, waiting, firing,
 At the hour of half past four in the morning,
 Now this has been in my mind sometimes
 When after a long day's work and more than half a night
 I opened the east window before going to bed
 At half past three o'clock in the morning
 And there were deer feet and horns of stars on the sky
 I listened to the chiming of a watch and said,
 "A couple of hours and Jim'll kill a deer, maybe"
 There are different kinds of early hours

HUNGRY AND LAUGHING MEN

LOVE to keep? There is no love to keep
 There is memory to keep of running water,
 running horses, running weather, running days.

When I see the rain-glad eaves filling and the
 beat of the running spills on the ferns,
 Or if I come to a pony heel mark, a half loop on
 a smooth Kentucky blue grass,
 Or stand in a Dutch landscape of running threats
 in changing lights of interchangeable running
 sun and rain-cloud—
 I shall take old note-books of Hokusai and Hiroshige,
 memoirs of the wonderful hungry laughing men, and in
 an off corner, write my code
 Love to keep? There is no love to keep
 There is memory of runners, foot-glad fingers,
 heel marks in the blue grass, running
 threats of interchangeable sun and rain-cloud

FATE

FATE comes with pennies or dollars
An Indian head or the Goddess of Liberty
it is all the same to Fate
One day copper, one day silver, and these
are samples
The cry held back
the kiss kept under
the song choked down
the wish never spoken
They are pennies and dollars these
The girl at the sink washing dishes knows them
The girl who has breakfast in bed knows them

CHEAP BLUE

HILL blue among the leaves in summer,
Hill blue among the branches in winter—
Light sea blue at the sand beaches in winter,
Deep sea blue in the deep deep waters—
Prairie blue, mountain blue—
Who can pick a pocketful of these blues,
a handkerchief of these blues,
And go walking, talking, walking as though
God gave them a lot of loose change
For spending money, to throw at the birds,
To flip into the tin cups of blind men?

LAVENDER LILIES

THE lavender lilies in Garfield Park lay lazy in the morning sun.
A cool summer wind flicked at our eyebrows and the pansies fixed their
yellow drops and circles for a day's show
The statue of Lincoln, an ax in his hand, a bronze ax, was a chum of five
bluejays crazy and calling, "Another lovely morning, another lovely
morning"

And the headline of my newspaper said, "Thirty dead in race riots."
And Lincoln with the ax, and all the lavender lilies and the cool summer
wind and the pansies, the living lips of bronze and leaves, the living
tongues of bluejays, all they could say was,
"Another lovely morning, another lovely morning"

HALF WAY

At the half-way house the pony died
The road stretched ahead, the sunny hills,
people in the fields, running waters,
towns with new names, windmills pointing
circles in the air at holy crossroads
It was here we stopped at the half-way house,
here where the pony died
Here the keeper of the house said, "It is strange
how many ponies die here"

BETWEEN WORLDS

AND he said to himself
in a sunken morning moon
between two pines,
between lost gold and lingering green

I believe I will count up my worlds
There seem to me to be three
There is a world I came from which is Number One.
There is a world I am in now, which is Number Two
There is a world I go to next, which is Number Three

There was the seed pouch, the place I lay dark in, nursed and shaped in
a warm, red, wet cuddling place, if I tugged at a latchstring or
doubled a dimpled fist or twitched a leg or a foot, only the Mother
knew

There is the place I am in now, where I look back and
look ahead, and dream and wonder

There is the next place—

And he took a look out of a window
at a sunken morning moon
between two pines,
between lost gold and lingering green

M'LISS AND LOUIE

WHEN M'LISS went away from the old home
with its purple lilacs in front and white
fence pickets and green grass—

Where the slow black covers of evening and
night came dropping softly before the gold
moon came on the yellow roses—

Louie, the lonesome, spoke his thoughts to himself,
sitting in that same moonlight coming on the lilacs,
the roses —

Let her win her own thoughts, let her be
M'LISS always, let her sit alone after
whatever happens and see some of the outs
and ins of it,

Let her know the feel of the bones of
one of her hands resting on the other,

Let her lose love, gold,
names, promises, savings,

Let her know hot lips, crazy love letters,
cool heels, good wings, birds crossing big
windows of blue skies, time, oh God, time to
think things over, let her be M'LISS,

Let her be easy with all meanings of quiet
new sunsets, quiet fresh mornings, and long
sleeps in the old still moonlight,

Let her be M'LISS always.

Well . . . well . . . it was growing late in the evening of that day
when M'LISS went away, late, late into the night, as Louie, the lone-

some, sat sleepy in the gold of that same moon coming on the fence
pickets and the green grass, the purple lilacs, the yellow roses

He was sleepy Yet he could not sleep

Bitter Summer Thoughts

PHIZZOG

THIS face you got,
This here phizzog you carry around,
You never picked it out for yourself,
 at all, at all—did you?
This here phizzog—somebody handed it
 to you—am I right?
Somebody said, “Here’s yours, now go see
 what you can do with it”
Somebody slipped it to you and it was like
 a package marked
“No goods exchanged after being taken away”—
This face you got

BITTER SUMMER THOUGHTS

THE riders of the wind
Weave their shadows,
Trample their time-beats,
Take their time-bars,
Shake out scrolls,
And run over the oats, the barley,
Over the summer wheat-fields

The farmer and the horse,
The steel and the wagon
Come and clean the fields
And leave us stubble
The time-bars of the wind are gone,
The shadows, time-beats, scrolls,
They are woven away, put past,
Into the hands of threshers,
Into chaff, into dust,
Into rust and buff of straw stacks,
Into sliding, shoveling oats and wheat
Over the wheat-fields,
Over the oats,
Summer weaves, is woven away, put past,
Into dust, into rust and buff

Indian runners ran along this river road
They cleaned the wind they clutched in ribs and lungs,
Up over the clean ankles, the clean elbows
The Frenchmen came with lessons and prayers
The Scotchmen came with horses and rifles
Cities, war, railroads came

In the rain storms, in the blizzards,
This river road is clean

BITTER SUMMER THOUGHTS—NO 3

FIRECRACKERS came from China
Watermelons came from Egypt
The horses of the sun hoist their heads and nicker at the fence where the
first old evening stars fish for faces
And the light of the eyes of a child at a morning window calling to an
early morning snow, this too is a stranger among strangers

The splendors of old books may be counted
The spears of brass lights, shining in the dawn of the tug-boats and ware
houses, throw other splendors
Yet a corn wind is in my ears, a rushing of corn leaves swept by summer,
it is in my ears, the corn wind

BITTER SUMMER THOUGHTS—NO XXII

QUICKER AND EASIER

THE billboards and the street car signs told the people,
"Say it with flowers" and those who could buy flowers
And who knew no other way of saying found themselves
In the habit of saying it with flowers
Men whose personal fragrance had no special whiff
Of fresh air, clean dirt, and growing things,
Found it easier to telephone the florist
And say it with flowers—quicker and easier

YES, SAY IT WITH FLOWERS!

Women rather wear flowers than no flowers
Gift flowers never tell where they came from
A woman's flowers ought to whisper she has
 secrets worth hearing told
If a woman tells a man, "Send me no flowers,"
 that is the end
All women try to guess who would send an armful
 of roses for the coffin if one dies, if one has
 a funeral, if all one's friends know there is a
 funeral
Each woman knows what one flower she would wear if
 called on to wear a flower at a wedding tomorrow

BARS

BEAT at the bars
Cry out your cry of want
Let yourself out if you can
Find the sea, find the moon,
 if you can
Shut the windows, open the doors
There are no windows, are no doors?
There is no sea, is no moon?
Cry your cry, let yourself out if you can

THEY ASK IS GOD, TOO, LONELY?

WHEN God scooped up a handful of dust,
And spit on it, and molded the shape of man,
And blew a breath into it and told it to walk—
That was a great day

And did God do this because He was lonely?
Did God say to Himself he must have company
And therefore He would make man to walk the earth
And set apart churches for speech and song with God?

These are questions
They are scrawled in old caves
They are painted in tall cathedrals
There are men and women so lonely they believe
God, too, is lonely

TWO NOCTURNS

1

THE sea speaks a language polite people never repeat
It is a colossal scavenger slang and has no respect
Is it a terrible thing to be lonely?

2

The prairie tells nothing unless the rain is willing
It is a woman with thoughts of her own
Is it a terrible thing to love much?

USELESS WORDS

So long as we speak the same language and never understand each other,
So long as the spirals of our words snarl and interlock
And clutch each other with the irreckonable gutturals,
Well

WANTING THE IMPOSSIBLE

SUPPOSE he wishes balloon routes
to five new moons, one woman,
and a two-acre bean farm with
bean poles and waltzing scare-
crows wearing clown hats
Ah-hah, ah-hah, this to God,
this to me, this is something

MONEY, POLITICS, LOVE AND GLORY

Who put up that cage?
Who hung it up with bars, doors?
Why do those on the inside want to get out?
Why do those outside want to get in?
What is this crying inside and out all the time?
What is this endless, useless beating of baffled
wings at these bars, doors, this cage?

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

(After Gustave Froding in the Swedish)

THE sea roars, the storm whistles,
Waves roll ashen gray,
"Man overboard, captain!"
Is that so?

"You can save his life yet, captain!"
The sea roars, the storm whistles
"Throw a rope to him, you can reach him"
Is that so?

Waves roll ashen gray.
"He's gone down, you can't see him
any more, captain!"
Is that so?
The sea roars, the storm whistles

EARLY LYNCHING

Two Christs were at Golgotha
One took the vinegar, another looked on
One was on the cross, another in the mob
One had the nails in his hands, another the stiff
 fingers holding a hammer driving nails
There were many more Christs at Golgotha, many more
 thief pals, many many more in the mob howling the
 Judean equivalent of, "Kill Him! Kill Him!"
The Christ they killed, the Christ they didn't kill,
 those were the two at Golgotha

Pity, pity, the bones of these broken ankles
Pity, pity, the slimp of these broken wrists
The mother's arms are strong to the last
She holds him and counts the heart drips

The smell of the slums was on him
Wrongs of the slums lit his eyes
Songs of the slums wove in his voice
The haters of the slums hated his slum heart

The leaves of a mountain tree,
Leaves with a spinning star shook in them,
Rocks with a song of water, water, over them,
Hawks with an eye for death any time, any time,
The smell and the sway of these were on his sleeves,
 were in his nostrils, his words

The slum man they killed, the mountain man lives on

PLUNGER

EMPTY the last drop
Pour out the final clinging heartbeat
Great losers look on and smile
Great winners look on and smile

Plunger
Take a long breath and let yourself go

Rain Winds

RAIN WINDS BLOW DOORS OPEN

DREAMING of grips at her heart
She asked in a sleep and between sleeps,
"What is mercy and why am I asking mercy?"

The doors in her dreams opened
And a rain wind blew in the doorway
And treetops moaned under footsteps over

Dreaming of a road running off
Into the roads gone crossways on the sky,
She shook in a dream and cried between sleeps,
"How many miles, how many days, how many years?"

The strips of the sun
Spelled a name on the floor in the morning
She tried to spell out the name, the letters
"A rain wind blows in the doorway," she said,
"And a road goes crossways on the sky," she said,
"And the night lets nobody know how many miles,
how many days, how many years "

WIND HORSES

Roots, go deep wrap your coils, fasten your knots
Fix a loop far under, a four-in-hand far under
The wind drives wild horses, gnashers, plungers
Go deep, roots
Hold your four-in-hand knots against all wild horses

RIVER MOON

THE moon in the river, mother, is a red, red moon tonight
I am going away on the wild, wild moon, the moon so red on the river
tonight, mother

A man with a wild dream on his tongue, a flying wild dream in his
head and his heart,
A man is here with a runaway drum in his ribs, and shots of the sun in
the runners of his blood

I am going away on the red, wild runaway moon
The moon on the river, mother, is red tonight

The mist on the river is white and the moon on the mist is white
I remember, mother, I remember he came when the moon was red, with
a runaway drum in his ribs
I remember, mother, the shots of the sun in the runners of his blood,
the flying wild dream on his tongue
Tonight I remember, tonight with the mist on the river white and the
moon on the mist white

Something is gone—is it him that's gone or is it the red, wild runaway
moon that's gone?

THEY MET YOUNG

1

"I COULD cry for roses, thinking of you,
Thinking of your lips, so like roses,
Thinking of the meetings of lips
And the crying of eyes meeting"

"I could love you in shadows, drinking
Of you, drinking till a morning sun
I could touch the young heart of you
And learn all your red songs"

"I could answer the metronomes of blood,
The time-beats of your sweet kisses
I could sing a star song or a sun song
In the crying of eyes meeting"

2

"Give me your lips
Let Egypt come or Egypt go
Open a window of stars
Let a bag of shooting stars fall
Wind us with a winding silk
Pick us a slouching, foolish moon
Take us to a silver blue morning
It is too much—let your lips go
The hammers call, the laws of the
 hammers knock on gongs, beat and
 beat on gongs
It is too much—give me your lips
 —let your lips go"

YELLOW EVENING STAR

THE flush pink runner of the sun
Ran out with a ribbon leap
In the line of a yellow evening star

Was there a murmur?
"Whither thou goest thither will I go?"
Was there a run and a jump—
Then old sea cliffs, clean high bastions?

FACE

I WOULD beat out your face in brass
The side of your head I would beat out in brass
The nose, the mouth, the hang of the hair thick over
 your head, the cool straight-looking forehead,

I would take a hammer and a sheet of brass and beat
them out till your face would be set against rain,
frost, storm, sea-water and sea-salt, against hoofs,
wheels, nails, against tidewater, rust, verdigris
I would set your face at a blue crossways of sea beaches,
a dream of blue and brass

HEAD

HERE is a head with a blur of horizons
She sits where a sweep of leaves is on
When the wind swept in the spring leaves,
When the wind swept out the autumn leaves,
She sat here with her head a blur of horizons
She sat here and a worker in brass asked her
And no answer came and the winds swept on
And the leaves swept on and her head took form
Against the blur of horizons

EXPLANATIONS OF LOVE

THERE is a place where love begins and a place
where love ends

There is a touch of two hands that foils all
dictionaries

There is a look of eyes fierce as a big Bethlehem open hearth
furnace or a little green-fire acetylene torch

There are single careless bywords portentous as a
big bend in the Mississippi River

Hands, eyes, bywords—out of these love makes
battlegrounds and workshops

There is a pair of shoes love wears and the coming
is a mystery

There is a warning love sends and the cost of it
is never written till long afterward

There are explanations of love in all languages
and not one found wiser than this

There is a place where love begins and a place
where love ends—and love asks nothing

SEVEN ELEVEN

AMONG the grackles in a half circle on the grass
Two walked side by side on two legs apiece

Treetops bent in the wind and bird nests shuddered
This was why and only why the grackles sat in a half circle

Seven grackles came at first and sat in the half circle
Then there were eleven came with two legs apiece and sat in

They might have been crapshooters full of hope and hot
breaths
They might have been believers in luck, come seven, come
eleven

SPRAY

I WONDER what they called
Across the beaten spray,
Across the night's forehead

"The long kiss lasts," he told her
"I'm crazy about you," she answered

So they called
to the beaten spray,
to the night's forehead

BROKEN HEARTED SOPRANO

WHEN the soprano sang,
"Ask the stars, O beloved,"
There was a wind piling a cover,
Over the sky a cover of black

And the soprano was feeling
With a left hand over her heart
Trying to feel the deep hurt places,
Trying to measure the tired depths

There is a wind piles covers
The sky knows that wind out of old times
The stars know that wind out of old times

. . .

Have you pointed a finger
And beckoned a loose hand
Up at one star and found no answer?

EPISTLE

JESUS loved the sunsets on Galilee
Jesus loved the fishing boats forming silhouettes
 against the sunsets on Galilee
Jesus loved the fishermen on the fishing boats forming
 silhouettes against the sunsets on Galilee
When Jesus said Good-by, good-by, I will come again
 Jesus meant that good-by for the sunsets, the fishing boats, the fish-
ermen, the silhouettes all and any against the sunsets on Galilee
 the good-by and the promise meant all or nothing

MONKEY OF STARS

THERE was a tree of stars sprang up on a vertical panel of the south
And a monkey of stars climbed up and down in this tree of stars
And a monkey picked stars and put them in his mouth, tall up in a tree
 of stars shining in a south sky panel

I saw this and I saw what it meant and what it means was five, six,
seven, that's all, five, six, seven

Oh hoh, yah yah, loo loo, the meaning was five, six, seven, five, six, seven

Panels of changing stars, sashes of vapor, silver tails of meteor streams,
washes and rockets of fire—

It was only a dream, oh hoh, yah yah, loo loo, only a dream, five, six,
seven, five, six, seven

Great Rooms

SEA CHEST

THERE was a woman loved a man
as the man loved the sea
Her thoughts of him were the same
as his thoughts of the sea
They made an old sea chest for their belongings
together

WE HAVE GONE THROUGH GREAT ROOMS TOGETHER

AND when on the dark steel came the roads
Of a milky mist, and a spray of stars,
Bunches and squares and a spatter of stars,
We counted stars, one by one, a million and a million
And we remembered those stars as fishermen remember fish,
As bees remember blossoms, as crops remember rains
And these were rooms too, we can so reckon
We can always say we have gone through great rooms together

LOVE IN LABRADOR

ONE arch of the sky
Took on a spray of jewels

The crystals gleamed on the windows
Weaving their wintrish alphabets
Of spears and ovals fixed in frost
Fastened to a glass design
With a word This must be

There are shooters of the moon far north
There are dying eyes holding diadems
There are deaths sweet as laughing waters
There are gold heelprints on the fading
 staircases of the stars

SLEEP IMPRESSION

THE dark blue wind of early autumn
ran on the early autumn sky
in the fields of yellow moon harvest
 I slept, I almost slept,
 I said listening
Trees you have leaves rustling like rain
When there is no rain

MAYBE

MAYBE he believes me, maybe not
Maybe I can marry him, maybe not
Maybe the wind on the prairie,
The wind on the sea, maybe,
Somebody somewhere, maybe, can tell
I will lay my head on his shoulder
And when he asks me I will say yes,
Maybe

BUG SPOTS

THIS bug carries spots on his back
Last summer he carried these spots
Now it is spring and he is back here again
With a domino design over his wings
All winter he has been in a bedroom,
In a hole, in a hammock, hung up, stuck away,
Stashed while the snow blew over
The wind and the dripping icicles,
The tunnels of the frost
Now he has errands again in a rotten stump

UNDERSTANDINGS IN BLUE

THE bird sat on a red handle
Counting five star flowers,
Five clover leafs

The bird was a pigeon
Wearing a quiet understanding
Of how to wear blue

There is pigeon blue
Picked out of baskets of big sky
When the springtime is blue

This was the blue fadeout fire
Resting on the pigeon wings
In a quiet understanding

The red handle, the star flowers,
The green clover leafs,
Wove into the weaves of blue

The big sky stood back of it all
With a basket of springtime blue
And an understanding all alone

LET THEM ASK YOUR PARDON

CHILD, what can those old men bring you?
If they can bring you a new handful
Absolutely warm and soft as summer rain,
Let them ask your pardon and do it soon
Otherwise, why are they old?
Otherwise, why should they look at you
And carry assumptions in their old eyes
And speak such words as "ig-no-rance"
And "wisdom"—let them ask your pardon
Showing you how summer rain is an old pal
Of the wriggle of the angleworm,
The flip of the muskalonge,
And the step of the walking rain
Across the prairie If the old men, child,
Tell you no stories about rockets,
Shooting stars, horses of high ranges,
Let them ask your pardon, excuse themselves,
And go away

STRIPED CATS, OLD MEN AND PROUD STOCKINGS

1

RIDE a black horse with tan feet.
Let him have splashes of white,
Peninsulas of milk white
Tell him, "Giddap, paint horse"
Ride him then with a bridle in your left hand
and a hawk sitting on your right wrist
Wear a yellow dress and an orange bandana
tied over your forehead
So should a proud woman ride a proud horse
So should a woman ride to a horse show, a bird show,
To a public procession, to a secret wedding,
To a crying menagerie of proud striped cats

2

The old men who sit cross-legged in Hindustan
Naming the wedding days, the hungry days, the work days,
Handling their whiskers softly where the cascades
Come down numbering the years and the facts—
The old men look better close to the earth, cross-legged,
Pegged near the dirt, the home of the roots,
The home of years, facts

3

They have chosen stockings to cover their legs
By a feeling for choices fine as air
The appeal of stripes came to this one,
And spots, diamonds, clocks, anchors, to others,
The feeling for these choices was airy, fine,
Born of the deliberation of childbirths,
Thrust out with decision on the ends of their tongues
If a black horse wishes white sox
Or a white horse calls for tan footwear
Or an ankle covering of pigeon blue gray—
It is a balance born of deliberations, childbirths

MOON HAMMOCK

WHEN the moon was a hammock of gold,
And the gold of the moon hammock kept changing
Till there was a blood hammock of a moon—
And the slow slipping down of it in the west,
The idle easy slipping down of it
Left a bridge of stars
And marchers among the stars—
That was an evening, a calendar date,
A curve of lines in an almanac
People said it was an hour in September or April
The astronomers stood at the mirror angles
Putting down another movement of the moon
The same as so many other movements of the moon
Put down in the big books of the regular watchers

Of the moon This is the way things go by
The gold hammock of a moon changes to blood,
Slips down, leaves a bridge of stars, marchers, almanacs

THIMBLE ISLANDS

THE sky and the sea put on a show
Every day they put on a show
There are dawn dress rehearsals
There are sweet monotonous evening monologues
The acrobatic lights of sunsets dwindle and darken
The stars step out one by one with a bimbo, bimbo.

The red ball of the sun hung a balloon in the west,
And there was half a balloon, then no balloon at all,
And ten stars marched out and ten thousand more,
And the fathoms of the sky far over met the fathoms of the sea far
under, among the thimble islands

In the clear green water of dawn came a float of silver filaments, feelers
circling a pink polyp's mouth,
The feelers ran out, opened and closed, opened and closed, hungry and
searching, soft and incessant, floating the salt sea inlets sucking the
green sea water as land roses suck the land air

Frozen rock humps, smooth fire-rock humps—
Thimbles on the thumbs of the wives of prostrate sunken
giants—
God only knows how many sleep in the slack of the
seven seas

There in those places
under the sun balloons,
and fathoms, filaments, feelers—

The wind and the rain
sew the years
stitching one year into another

Heavy hammers and high blowouts
 take their pay, fill their contracts—
 And there are dawn dress rehearsals, sweet
 monotonous evening monologues

CLEFS

THE little moon rode up a high corner
 The woman in a little room sat alone
 A violin the woman had sang for her
 The gut strings and the bow bent
 A series of clefs climbing for memories
 "For remembering," she said, "A little moon
 Up a high corner and climbing violin clefs "

THE GREAT PROUD WAGON WHEELS GO ON

THE great proud wagon wheels
 go on Out of night and night's
 nothings a steel shaft, a white
 fire, a new star

The great proud wagon wheels
 go on Out of night and night's
 nothings a proud head, a skull
 shape, a thing looking, a face
 and eyes

The great proud wagon wheels
 go on Night again and night's
 nothings again and the star and
 the skull and face gone

I wait I know Look! The great
 proud wagon wheels go on Now
 what? Now who? coming
 out of night and night's nothings
 coming you? and you?

TALL TIMBER

NIGHT calls many witnesses
to supply evidence, to report honestly,
the meaning of dying, loving, being born

Night has no better witnesses
than tall timber, rich in a moon, roaming in mist,
swearing a corroboration of relevant circumstances

Call others to the courthouses of earth,
let them have counsel and all benefits of doubt,
let them report all they have seen and heard

Then let Night come into court
The tall timber testifies, the moon, the mist, testify
Let us hear the oaths of these unimpeachable witnesses

PROUD TORSOS

Just before the high time of autumn
Comes with the crush of its touch,
And the leaves fall, the leaves one by one,
The leaves by a full darkening sky fall,
The trees look proud, the horse chestnut
Stands with a gathered pride, the ivies
Are gathered around the stumps,
The ivies are woven thick with a green coat
Covering the stumps Yes, the trees
Look proud now, it is the big time
Have they not all had summer?
Didn't they all flimmer with faint
Lines of green in the spring,
A thin green mist as if it might
Be air or it might be new green leaves?
So, the first weeks of September are on
And each tree stands with a murmur,

"I stand here with a count of one more year,
One more number, one more ring in my torso"
Two weeks, five, six weeks, and the trees
Will be standing stripped gaunt
The leaves gone the coat of green gone
And they will be proud but no longer
With the gathered pride of the days
In the high time

TO KNOW SILENCE PERFECTLY

THERE is a music for lonely hearts nearly always
If the music dies down there is a silence
Almost the same as the movement of music
To know silence perfectly is to know music

Sky Pieces

SKY PIECES

PROUDLY the fedoras march on the heads of the somewhat
careless men
PROUDLY the slouches march on the heads of the still more
careless men
PROUDLY the panamas perch on the noggins of dapper
debonair men
COMICALLY somber the derbies gloom on the earnest solemn
noodles
And the sombrero, most proud, most careless, most dapper and debonair

of all, somberly the sombrero marches on the heads of important
men who know what they want
Hats are skypieces, hats have a destiny, wish your hat
slowly, your hat is you

LOVABLE BABBLERS

WHAT did that old philosopher say?
"The deadeat deaths are the best"
For he was the same who said to a friend
When you cry I cry, when you shake hands with
me and ease my luck telling me it's too
bad and the world's all wrong, it melts
something inside of me and I break down
So there are babblers we love for what they are

OOMBA

OOMBA went along years
Lugging a head
On a pikestaff of human neck
"It is mine," said Oomba,
"If it is not mine who does it
Belong to?" he asked,
Oomba putting a straight quiz
To Oomba himself

"Here it is," he muttered,
"Here on my neck, here on
My pikestaff of human neck,
And what is it for and how did I get it
And why do I say it is mine
And because it is mine it belongs to me?"
So Oomba went on talking to Oomba
Asking the simplest, oldest questions
Of himself

SEVENTEEN MONTHS

THIS girl child speaks five words
No for no and no for yes, "no" for either
 no or yes
"Teewee" for wheat or oats or corn or barley
 or any food taken with a spoon
"Go way" as an edict to keep your distance
 and let her determinations operate

"Spoon" for spoon or cup or anything to be handled,
 all instruments, tools, paraphernalia of utility
 and convenience are SPOONS
Mama is her only epithet and synonym for God and the
 Government and the one force of majesty and in-
 telligence obeying the call of pity, hunger, pain,
 cold, dark—MAMA, MAMA, MAMA

SARAH'S LETTER TO PETER

WHEN Sarah wrote Peter how she slept
among silver leaf poplars, waking to see
a light wind moving the under-side of the leaves—

She told him how to the north and east
there came a bath of light, a slow flush,
and the larks shot out into the air,
curved up and sang to meet the rose-red dawn

But it wasn't dawn
Four dark hours crept on till dawn arrived
And the larks crept back to their nests
And later met the dawn that came and stayed,
Met it only with silence, with sore, dumb hearts

Does every love have a false dawn?

She wrote her lover
Others are but the showers of April, whilst
thou art the seven seas
Making a rendezvous and then not keeping it is wrong
Do not be a false dawn, I want thee forever

And this was one of the chapters

DESTROYERS

GRANDFATHER and grandfather's uncle stand looking at the harbor "Look there," says grandfather, "and you see a torpedo boat Next to it is a torpedo boat destroyer And next to the torpedo boat destroyer is a destroyer of torpedo boat destroyers"

And grandfather's uncle says, "I heard my grandfather's uncle say every echo has a destroyer and for every echo destroyer there is a destroyer of echo destroyers"

And grandfather's uncle says, "I remember hearing my grandfather's uncle say every destroyer carries a pocket of eggs and the eggs wait and when they are ready they go blooey and the works of the destroyer blows up."

So they stand looking at the harbor, grandfather a grand old gray-whiskered monochromic sea-dog and grandfather's uncle a grand old gray whiskered monochromic landlubber

"Columbus," says grandfather, "Columbus was only a little dago, a ginny, a wop, and he changed the shape of the earth, before Columbus came the shape of the earth in the heads of men was square and flat and he made it round and round in the heads of men"

"Yes," said grandfather's uncle, "he was bugs, he was loony, he saw things in a pig's eye, he had rats in his garret, bats in his belfry, there was a screw loose somewhere in him, he had a kink and he was a crank, he was nuts and belonged in a booby hatch"

And the two grand old gray-whiskered monochromic men, one a sea-dog, the other a landlubber, laughed, laughed, laughed in each other's sea-green, land-gray eyes

TWO WOMEN AND THEIR FATHERS

1

HER father was a policeman who went fishing summer Sundays and caught a carp once with an old Spanish coin in its belly As for her she picks up a good living high in the air in pink tights on a trapeze working for Ringling's circus

2

Her father wore hip rubber boots and stood in yellow clay digging a tunnel for street cars to dip under the Chicago river As for her she goes by a Hawaiian name and is known for a dance wherein she takes off one garment after another till there is a semblance of no garments at all

VERY VERY IMPORTANT

I HAVE no doubt that it is very important and so are you
Put in two more of the word 'very' as a prefix to the
word 'important' if you like
Make it read I have no doubt it is very very very im-
portant and so are you
Thus there are three of the word 'very' standing in a row
as prefixes to 'important'
If you wish more of the word 'very' go to the same place
these came from

FOOLISH ABOUT WINDOWS

I WAS foolish about windows
The house was an old one and the windows
were small
I asked a carpenter to come and open the
walls and put in bigger windows
"The bigger the window the more it costs,"
he said
"The bigger the cheaper," I said
So he tore off siding and plaster and laths
And put in a big window and bigger windows
I was hungry for windows

One neighbor said, "If you keep on you'll be
able to see everything there is"
I answered, "That'll be all right, that'll be
classy enough for me"
Another neighbor said, "Pretty soon your house
will be all windows"
And I said, "Who would the joke be on then?"
And still another, "Those who live in glass
houses gather no moss"
And I said, "Birds of a feather should not throw
stones and a soft answer turneth away rats"

LOVE LETTER TO HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

THE kitchen chair speaks to the bread knife,
"Why have you no legs?"
The bread knife answers, "And you no teeth?"
It was a quarrel on a summer day
It ran on till winter
And on to another winter and another
In the cellar ultimately
The kitchen chair said,
"Your teeth are gone,"
And the bread knife,
"I see you have no legs"
It was quiet in the cellar, they found,
No yammering of people, no soup nor nuts,
A pile of coal, old mops, and broken tools,
These they could talk with and mostly
None of them talked at all

MYSTERIOUS BIOGRAPHY

CHRISTOFO COLOMBO was a hungry man,
hunted himself half way round the world;
he began poor, panhandled, ended in jail,
Christofo so hungry, Christofo so poor,
Christofo in the chilly, steel bracelets,
honorable distinguished Christofo Colombo.

RAT RIDDLES

THERE was a gray rat looked at me
with green eyes out of a rathole

"Hello, rat," I said,
"Is there any chance for me
to get on to the language of the rats?"

And the green eyes blinked at me,
blinked from a gray rat's rathole

"Come again," I said,
"Slip me a couple of riddles,
there must be riddles among the rats"

And the green eyes blinked at me
and a whisper came from the gray rathole
"Who do you think you are and why is a rat?
Where did you sleep last night and why do
you sneeze on Tuesdays? And why is the
grave of a rat no deeper than the grave
of a man?"

And the tail of a green-eyed rat
Whipped and was gone at a gray rathole.

WINTER WEATHER

It is cold
The bitter of the winter
whines a story
It is the colder weather when the truck
drivers sing it would freeze the whiskers
off a brass monkey
It is the bitterest whining of the winter
now

Well, we might sit down now, have a cup of coffee
apiece, and talk about the weather
We might look back on things that happened long
ago, times when the weather was different
Or we might talk about things ahead of us, funny
things in the days, days, days to come, days when
the weather will be different again

Yes, a cup of coffee apiece
Even if this winter weather is bitter,
The truck drivers are laughing
It would freeze the whiskers off a brass monkey

THE DINOSAUR BONES

THE dinosaur bones are dusted every day
The cards tell how old we guess the dinosaur
bones are
Here a head was seven feet long, horns with a
hell of a ram,
Humping the humps of the Montana mountains
The respectable school children
Chatter at the heels of their teacher who ex-
plains
The tourists and wonder hunters come with
their parasols
And catalogues and arrangements to do the
museum
In an hour or two hours
The dinosaur bones
are dusted
every day

UNINTENTIONAL PAINT

THE flat gray banana store front
is visited by a union painter with no intentions
and a bucket of high maroon paint
and a pot of high yellow

The high maroon banana store front
sings its contralto with two stripes
of yellow soprano on the door

The union painter meant nothing
and we can not attribute intentions
to a bucket of maroon nor a pot of yellow

The door and the lintels sing
Two banjos strum on the threshold
Two people hum a snatch of song
They know well from singing together often
I must come this way often
and not only for bananas

PEOPLE OF THE EAVES, I WISH YOU GOOD MORNING

THE wrens have troubles like us The house of a wren will not run itself
any more than the house of a man

They chatter the same as two people in a flat where the laundry came back
with the shirts of another man and the shimmy of another woman

The shirt of a man wren and the shimmy of a woman wren are a trouble
in the wren house It is this or something else back of this chatter a spring
morning

Trouble goes so quick in the wren house Now they are hopping wren jigs
beaten off in a high wren staccato time

People of the eaves, I wish you good morning, I wish you a thousand
thanks

WEDDING POSTPONED

THE arrangements are changed
We were going to marry at six o'clock
Now we shall not marry at all

The bridegroom was all ready
And the best man of the bridegroom was ready.

The bride fixed out in orchids and a long veil,
The bride and six bridesmaids were all ready

Then the arrangements changed
The date was changed not from six o'clock till later
The date was changed to no time at all, to never

Why the arrangements were changed is a long story
Tell half of it and it is better than nothing at all
Tell it with a hint and a whisper and it is told wrong

We know why it was put off,
Why the arrangements shifted,
Why the organist was told to go,
Why the minister ready for the ring ceremony
Was told to drive away and be quick about it, please
We know this in all its results and circumstances

The disappointment of the best man,
The sorry look on the faces of the bridesmaids,
We, who chose them out of many, we could understand

And we told them only what is told here
The arrangements are changed, there will be no wedding,
We shall not marry at all, not today, not tomorrow, no
time

TWO WOMEN

THEY told me in an old book
about the wine-dark sea

I saw the sea foam-lit and
green, sunset-red and changing

I saw the sea wine-dark only
when I thought of you and your eyes

. .

The fabrics shift in her eyes
Persian cat fur is soft,

A Navajo blanket beautifully woven,
And is there anything more restful
than a Japanese sea-mist silk?
The fabrics shift in her voice

SNATCH OF SLIPHORN JAZZ

ARE you happy? It's the only
way to be, kid
Yes, be happy, it's a good nice
way to be
But not happy-happy, kid, don't
be too doubled-up doggone happy
It's the doubled-up doggone happy-
happy people bust hard they
do bust hard when they bust
Be happy, kid, go to it, but not too
doggone happy

LANDSCAPE

ON a mountain-side the real estate agents
Put up signs marking the city lots to be sold there
A man whose father and mother were Irish
Ran a goat farm half-way down the mountain,
He drove a covered wagon years ago,
Understood how to handle a rifle,
Shot grouse, buffalo, Indians, in a single year,
And now was raising goats around a shanty
Down at the foot of the mountain
Two Japanese families had flower farms
A man and woman were in rows of sweet peas
Picking the pink and white flowers
To put in baskets and take to the Los Angeles market
They were clean as what they handled
There in morning sun, the big people and baby-faces
Across the road high on another mountain
Stood a house saying, "I am it," a commanding house
There was the home of a motion picture director

Famous for lavish doll house interiors,
Clothes ransacked from the latest designs for women
In the combats of "male against female"
The mountain, the scenery, the layout of the landscape,
And the peace of the morning sun as it happened,
The miles of houses pocketed in the valley beyond—
It was all worth looking at, worth wondering about,
How long it might last, how young it might be

[HOLLYWOOD, 1923]¹

DIFFERENT KINDS OF GOOD-BY

GOOD-BY is a loose word, a yellow ribbon
fluttering in the wind
Good-by is a stiff word, a steel slide rule—
a fixed automatic phone number
A thousand people? And you must say good-by
to all? One at a time?—yes, I guess you
need a thousand different good-bys
There is a good-by for the Johnsons and another
for the Smiths and another for the Poindexters
and the Van Rensselaers
And there is the big grand good-by to the thousand
all at once, the whole works

THREE HILLS LOOK DIFFERENT IN THE MOONSHINE

THE hill of the white skull in the summer moon
shines, the hill of the red heart is a neighbor
in the summer moonshine, the hill of the climbing
clumsy shadows is another

PROUD OF THEIR RAGS

THEY come down from the mountains, proud of their rags
"What do you know about loons, panthers, hawks?
Wings, winds, slides—what do you know?"

Hunger and hope, and how do you know who tore my rags?"
They come down from the mountains, proud of their rags,
 five or six out of sixty, they come down with proud
 heads

BROKEN SKY

THE sky of gray is eaten in six places,
Rag holes stand out
It is an army blanket and the sleeper
 slept too near the fire

HELLS AND HEAVENS

EACH man pictures his hell or heaven different
Some have snug home-like heavens, suburban, well-kept
Some have a wild, storm-swept heaven, their happiness has
 been in storms, heaven must have storms mixed with
 fair weather
And hell for some is a jail, for others a factory, for others
 a kitchen, for others a place of many polite liars full
 of blah, all gah gah

THREE FRAGMENTS FOR FISHERS OF DESTINY

METHUSALEH was a witness to many cabbages and kings
They marched in procession for him like the marching
 harvests of onions lift their green spears in Maytime
 and go down the wind in thistledown fluff with the
 leaves of October

The same wind blew its crescendo and diminuendo in the
 long beards of clear-eyed prophets and again in the
 whiskers of the muddleheads who only called them-
 selves prophets

Methusaleh saw the old muddleheads sniff at the sun
And proclaim their wisdom as beyond the sun

Timber Moon

TIMBER MOON

THERE is a way the moon looks into the timber at night
And tells the walnut trees secrets of silver sand—
There is a way the moon makes a lattice work
Under the leaves of the hazel bushes—
There is a way the moon understands the hoot owl
Sitting on an arm of a sugar maple throwing its
One long lonesome cry up the ladders of the moon—
There is a way the moon finds company early in the fall-
time

FLOWERS TELL MONTHS

GOLD buttons in the garden today—
Among the brown-eyed susans the golden spiders are
gambling
The blue sisters of the white asters speak to each other

After the travel of the snows—
Buttercups come in a yellow rain,
Johnny-jump-ups in a blue mist—
Wild azaleas with a low spring cry

LANDSCAPE

SEE the trees lean to the wind's way of learning.
See the dirt of the hills shape to the water's
way of learning
See the lift of it all go the way the biggest
wind and the strongest water want it.

COUNTING

SWEET lips, there are songs about kisses now
Looking backward are kisses of remembrance
Looking ahead are kisses to be wished-for
So time is counted, so far back, so far ahead, in
 measurements of sweet kisses

OAK ARMS

THE broken arm of the black oak
blisters in the list of numbers
 "The sky hissed, I stand and remember"

And the gold of the gloaming flushes, floods by,
And the haze gold is cut across with the cricket's
 wisp of silver

MOON PATH

CREEP up, moon, on the south sky
Mark the moon path of this evening
The day must be counted
The new moon is a law
The little say-so of the moon must be listened to

THERE ARE DIFFERENT GARDENS

FLOWERS can be cousins of the stars
The closing and speaking lips of the lily
And the warning of the fire and the dust—
They are in the gardens and the sky of stars
Beyond the shots of the light of this sun
Are the little sprinkles, the little twinklers
Of suns to whose lips this lily never sent
A whisper from its closing and speaking lips.

WINDFLOWER LEAF

THIS flower is repeated
out of old winds, out of
old times

The wind repeats these, it
must have these, over and
over again

New windflowers so fresh,
oh beautiful leaves, here
now again

The domes over
fall to pieces
The stones under
fall to pieces
Rain and ice
wreck the works
The wind keeps, the windflowers
keep, the leaves last,
The wind young and strong lets
these last longer than stones

LITTLE SKETCH

THERE are forked branches of trees
Where the leaves shudder obediently,
Where the hangover leaves
Flow in a curve downward,
And between the forks and leaves,
In patches and angles, in square handfuls,
The orange lights of the done sunset
Come and filter and pour

BUTTER COLORS

THE light of the yellow flowers
leaps to the light of the pool

Butter under the chin of this slip
slides to the level water mirror

Fan yellow films of light play fast
slipping all day on, on, to the water home

Home, come home, water calls to light
Fan yellow films leap and slide.

WEBS

EVERY man spins a web of light circles
And hangs this web in the sky
Or finds it hanging, already hung for him,
Written as a path for him to travel
The white spiders know how this geography goes
Their feet tell them when to spin,
How to weave in a criss-cross
Among elms and maples, among radishes and button weeds,
Among cellar timbers and old shanty doors
Not only the white spiders, also the yellow and blue,
Also the black and purple spiders
Listen when their feet tell them to spin one
And while every spider spins a web of light circles
Or finds one already hung for him,
So does every man born under the sky

PEACE, NIGHT, SLEEP

"You shall have peace with night and sleep
It was written in the creep of the mist,
In the open doors of night horizons

Peace, night, sleep, all go together
In the forgetting of the frogs and the sun,
In the losing of the grackle's off cry
And the call of the bird whose name is gone—
You shall have peace, the mist creeps, the doors open
Let night, let sleep, have their way”

BUNDLES

I HAVE thought of beaches, fields,
Tears, laughter

I have thought of homes put up—
And blown away

I have thought of meetings and for
Every meeting a good-by

I have thought of stars going alone,
Ones in pairs, sunsets in blundering
Wistful deaths

I have wanted to let go and cross over
To a next star, a last star

I have asked to be left a few tears
And some laughter

MAN AND DOG ON AN EARLY WINTER MORNING

THERE was a tall slough grass
Too tough for the farmers to feed the cattle,
And the wind was sifting through, shaking the grass,
Each spear of grass interfered a little with the wind
And the interference sent up a soft hiss,
A mysterious little fiddler's and whistler's hiss,
And it happened all the spears together
Made a soft music in the slough grass

Too tough for the farmers to cut for fodder
 "This is a proud place to come to
 On a winter morning, early in winter,"
 Said a hungry man, speaking to his dog,
Speaking to himself and the passing wind,
 "This is a proud place to come to "

PRECIOUS MOMENTS

BRIGHT vocabularies are transient as rainbows
Speech requires blood and air to make it
Before the word comes off the end of the tongue,
While the diaphragms of flesh negotiate the word,
In the moment of doom when the word forms
It is born, alive, registering an imprint—
Afterward it is a mummy, a dry fact, done and gone.
The warning holds yet Speak now or forever hold
 your peace
Ecce homo had meanings Behold the Man! Look at
 him! Dying he lives and speaks!

OCTOBER PAINT

FLAME blue wisps in the west,
Wrap yourselves in these leaves
And speak to winter about us
Tell winter the whole story

Red leaves up the oaken slabs,
You came, little and green spats
Four months ago, your climbers
Put scroll after scroll around
The oaken slabs "Red, come red,"
Some one with an October paint
Pot said And here you are,
Fifty red arrowheads of leaf paint
Or fifty mystic fox footprints
Or fifty pointed thumbprints

Hold on, the winds are to come
Blowing, blowing, the gray slabs
Will lose you, the winds will
Flick you away in a whiff
One by one, two by two Yet
I have heard a rumor whispered,
Tattlers tell it to each other
Like a secret everybody knows
Next year you will come again
Up the oaken slabs you will put
Your pointed fox footprints
Green in the early summer
And you will be red arrowheads
In the falltime Tattlers
Slip this into each other's ears
Like a secret everybody knows
 If I see some one with an
October paint pot I shall be
Full of respect and say,
"I saw your thumbprints everywhere,
How do you do it?"

MANY HATS

1

WHEN the scrapers of the
deep winds were done, and
the haulers of the tall
waters had finished, this
was the accomplishment.

The drums of the sun never
get tired, and first off
every morning, the drums of
the sun perform an intro-
duction of the dawn here

The moon goes down here
as a dark bellringer doing

once more what he has done
over and over already in
his young life

Up on a long blue platform
comes a line of starprints

If the wind has a song, it
is moaning, Good Lawd, I
done done what you told me
to do

2

Whose three-ring circus is this? Who stipulated in a contract for this to be drunken, death-defying, colossal, mammoth, cyclopean, mystic as the light that never was on land or sea, bland, composed, and imperturbable as a cool phalanx of sphinxes? Why did one woman cry, The silence is terrible? Why did another smile, There is a sweet gravity here? Why do they come and go here and look as in a looking-glass?

The Grand Canyon of Arizona, said one, this is it, hacked out by the broadax of a big left-handed God and left forgotten, fixed over and embellished by a remembering right-handed God who always comes back

If you ask me, said an old railroader, I'll never tell you who took the excavation contract for this blowout—it took a lot of shovels and a lot of dynamite—several large kegs, I would guess—and maybe they had a case or two of T N T

Yes, he went on, the Grand Canyon, the daddy of 'em all—the undisputed champeen—that range rider sure was righto—the elements had a hell of a rattle here

The Grand Canyon—a long ride from where Brigham Young stands in bronze gazing on the city he bade rise out of salt and alkali—a weary walk from Santa Fé and the Mountains of the Blood of Christ—a bitter hike from where the Sonora dove at Tucson mourns, No hope, no hope—a sweet distance from where Balboa stripped for his first swim in the Pacific—a mean cross-country journey to where Roy Bean told the muchacho, By the white light of a moon on the walls of an arroyo last Tuesday you killed

a woman and next Tuesday we're going to hang you—a traveler's route of many days and sleeps to reach the place of the declaration, God reigns and the government at Washington lives

Shovel into this cut of earth all past and present possessions, creations, belongings of man, shovel furioso, appassionata, pizzicato, shovel cities, wagons, ships, tools, jewels, the bottom isn't covered, the wild burros and the trail mules go haw-hee, haw-hee, haw-hee

Turn it into a Hall of Fame, said a rambler, let it be a series of memorials to the Four Horsemen, to Napoleon, Carl the Twelfth, Caesar, Alexander the Great, Hannibal and Hasdrubal, and all who have rode in blood up to the bridles of the horses, calling, Hurrah for the next who goes—let each have his name on a truncated cyclops of rock—let passers-by say, He was pretty good but he didn't last long

Now I wonder, I wonder, said another, can they all find room here? Eljah fed by the ravens, Jonah in the belly of the whale, Daniel in the lion's den, Lot's wife transmogrified into salt, Eljah riding up into the sky in a chariot of fire—can they all find room? Are the broken pieces of the Tower of Babel and the Walls of Jericho here? Should I look for the ram's horn Joshua blew?

3

A phantom runner runs on the rim "I saw a moon man throw hats in, hats of kings, emperors, senators, presidents, plumed hats of knights, red hats of cardinals, five-gallon hats of cowboys, tasselled hats of Bavarian yodelers, mandarin hats, derbies, fedoras, chapeaus, straws, lady picture hats out of Gainsborough portraits—

"Hats many proud people handed over, dying and saying, Take this one too—hats furioso, appassionata, pizzicato—hats for remembrance, good-by, three strikes and out, fade me, there's no place to go but home—hats for man alone, God alone, the sky alone"

4

Think of the little birds, said another, the wee birdies—before God took a hunk of mud and made Man they were here, the birds, the robins, juncos, nuthatches, bats, eagles, cedar birds, chickadees, bluejays, I saw a blackbird gleaming in satin, floating in the scrolls of his glamorous wings, stopping on an airpath and standing still with nothing under his

feet, looking at the gray Mojave desert level interrupted by the Grand Canyon—the birds belong, don't they?

5

Comes along a hombre saying, Let it be dedicated to Time, this is what is left of the Big Procession when Time gets through with it, the sun loves its stubs, we will give a name to any torso broken and tumbled by Time, we will leave the vanished torsos with no names

Comes along a hombre accidentally remarking, Let it be dedicated to Law and Order—the law of the Strong fighting the Strong, the Cunning out-witting the Less Cunning—and the Weak Ones ordered to their places by the Strong and Cunning—aye—and a-ee—Law and Order

Comes along another hombre giving his slant at it, Now this sure was the Gyarden of Eden, smooth, rich, nice, watered, fixed, no work till tomorrow, Adam and Eve satisfied and sitting pretty till the day of the Snake Dance and the First Sin, and God was disgusted and wrecked the works, he ordered club-foot angels with broken wings to shoot the job, now look at it

Comes another hombre all wised up, This was the Devil's Brickyard, here were the kilns to make the Kitchens of Hell, after bricks enough were made to last Hell a million years, the Devil said, "Shut 'er down", they had a big payday night and left it busted from hell to breakfast, the Hopis looked it over and decided to live eighty miles away where there was water, then came Powell, Hance, the Santa Fé, the boys shooting the rapids, and Fred Harvey with El Tovar

6

Now Hance had his points, they asked him how he come to find the Canyon and he told 'em, I was ridin' old Whitey and the Mojaves after me when we comes to this gap miles across, I told Whitey, It's you now for the longest jump you ever took, Whitey jumped and was half way across when I pulled on the bridle, turned him around, and we come back to the same place on the Canyon rim we started from

Yes, Hance told 'em, if they asked, how he come to dig the Canyon "But where did you put all the dirt?" "Took it away in wheelbarrows and made San Francisco Peaks"

Hance sleeping near a big rock, woke up and saw seven rattlesnakes circle seven times around the rock, each with the tail of the snake ahead in his

mouth, and all of them swallowing, till after a while there wasn't a snake left Hance's wife got her leg caught between two rocks, couldn't get her loose, said Hance, so I had to shoot her to save her from starving to death, look down there between those two rocks and you can see her bones, said Hance

This is where we find the original knuckle snake, he breaks to pieces if you try to pick him up, and when you go away he knuckles himself together again, yes, and down here, is the original echo canyon, we holler, "Has Smith been here?" and the echo promulgates back, "Which Smith?"

7

Down at the darkest depths, miles down, the Colorado River grinds, toils, driving the channel deeper—is it free or convict?—tell me—will it end like a great writer crying, I die with my best books unwritten?

Smooth as glass run the streaming waters—then a break into rapids, into tumblers, into spray, into voices, roars, growls, into commanding monotonous that hunt far corners and jumping-off places.

And how should a beautiful, ignorant stream of water know it heads for an early release—out across the desert, running toward the Gulf, below sea level, to murmur its lullaby, and see the Imperial Valley rise out of burning sand with cotton blossoms, wheat, watermelons, roses, how should it know?

8

The hombres keep coming, here comes another, he says, says he, I met four people this morning, the poker face, the baby stare, the icy mitt, and the peace that passeth understanding—let this place be dedicated to X, the unknown factor, to the Missing Link, to Jo Jo the dog-faced boy, to the Sargossa Sea, to Humpty Dumpty, to Little Red Riding Hood crying for her mother, to those who never believe in Santa Klaus, to the man who turned himself inside out because he was so sleepy

9

Steps on steps lift on into the sky, the lengths count up into stairways, let me go up for the Redeemer is up there, He died for me, so a Spanish Indian was speaking—and he asked, When the first French Jesuit looked from Yavapai four hundred years ago, did he murmur of a tall altar to go on a mile-long rock shelf down there on a mesa? did he whisper of an

unspeakably tall altar there for the raising of the ostensorium and the swinging of censers and the calling up of the presence of the Heart of the Living Christ? And he went on, Where the Son of God is made known surely is a place for the removal of shoes and the renewal of feet for the journey—surely this is so

10

Came a lean, hungry-looking hombre with Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas on his wind-bitten face, and he was saying, Sure my boy, sure my girl, and you're free to have any sweet bluebird fancies you please, any wild broncho thoughts you choose to have, when you stand before this grand scrap-pile of hats, hammers, haciendas, and hidalgos. He went on, Yes, let this be dedicated to Time and Ice, a memorial of the Human Family which came, was, and went, let it stand as a witness of the short miserable pilgrimage of mankind, of flame faiths, of blood and fire, and of Ice which was here first and will be here again—Faces once frozen you shall all be frozen again—the little clocks of Man shall all be frozen and nobody will be too late or too early ever again

11

On the rim a quizzical gray-glinting hombre was telling himself how it looked to him—the sun and the air are endless with silver tricks—the light of the sun has crimson stratagems—the changes go on in stop-watch split seconds—the blues slide down a box of yellow and mix with reds that melt into gray and come back saffron clay and granite pink—a weaving gamble of color twists on and it is anybody's guess what is next

A long sand-brown shawl shortens to a glimmering turquoise scarf—as the parapets and chimneys wash over and out in the baths of the sunset and the floats of the gloaming, one man says, There goes God with an army of banners, and another man, Who is God and why? who am I and why?

He told himself, This may be
something else than what I
see when I look—how do I
know? For each man sees him-
self in the Grand Canyon—
each one makes his own Canyon
before he comes, each one brings
and carries away his own Canyon—
who knows? and how do I know?

12

If the wind has a song, it
is moaning Good Lawd, I
done done what you told me
to do

When the scrapers of the
deep winds were done, and
the haulers of the tall
waters had finished, this
was the accomplishment

The moon goes down here
as a dark bellringer doing
once more what he has done
over and over already in
his young life

Up on a long blue platform
comes a line of starprints

The drums of the sun never
get tired, and first off
every morning, the drums of
the sun perform an intro-
duction of the dawn here

THE PEOPLE, YES

*Being several stories and psalms nobody would
want to laugh at*

*interspersed with memoranda variations worth a
second look*

*along with sayings and yarns traveling on grief and
laughter*

*running sometimes as a fugitive air in the classic
manner*

*breaking into jig time and tap dancing nohow
classical*

*and further broken by plain and irregular sounds
and echoes from*

*the roar and whirl of street crowds, work gangs,
sidewalk clamor,*

*with interludes of midnight cool blue and inviolable
stars*

over the phantom frames of skyscrapers

*DEDICATED
TO CONTRIBUTORS
DEAD AND LIVING*

The People, Yes

1

FROM the four corners of the earth,
from corners lashed in wind
and bitten with rain and fire,
from places where the winds begin
and fogs are born with mist children,
tall men from tall rocky slopes came
and sleepy men from sleepy valleys,
their women tall, their women sleepy,
with bundles and belongings,
with little ones babbling, "Where to now?
what next?"

The people of the earth, the family of man,
wanted to put up something proud to look at,
a tower from the flat land of earth
on up through the ceiling into the top of the sky

And the big job got going,
the caissons and pilings sunk,
floors, walls and winding staircases
aimed at the stars high over,
aimed to go beyond the ladders of the moon

And God Almighty could have struck them dead
or smitten them deaf and dumb

And God was a whimsical fixer
God was an understanding Boss
with another plan in mind,

And suddenly shuffled all the languages,
changed the tongues of men
so they all talked different
And the masons couldn't get what the hodcarriers said,
The helpers handed the carpenters the wrong tools,
Five hundred ways to say, "Who are you?"
Changed ways of asking, "Where do we go from here?"
Or of saying, "Being born is only the beginning,"
Or, "Would you just as soon sing as make that noise?"
Or, "What you don't know won't hurt you"
And the material-and-supply men started disputes
With the hauling gangs and the building trades
And the architects tore their hair over the blueprints
And the brickmakers and the mule skinnners talked back
To the straw bosses who talked back to the superintendents
And the signals got mixed, the men who shovelled the bucket
Hooted the hoisting men—and the job was wrecked

Some called it the Tower of Babel job
And the people gave it many other names
The wreck of it stood as a skull and a ghost,
a memorandum hardly begun,
swaying and sagging in tall hostile winds,
held up by slow friendly winds

2

From Illinois and Indiana came a later myth
Of all the people in the world at Howdeehow
For the first time standing together
From six continents, seven seas, and several archipelagoes,
From points of land moved by wind and water
Out of where they used to be to where they are,
The people of the earth marched and travelled
To gather on a great plain

At a given signal they would join in a shout,
So it was planned,
One grand hosannah, something worth listening to
And they all listened
The signal was given

And they all listened
And the silence was beyond words
They had come to listen, not to make a noise
They wanted to hear
So they all stood still and listened,
Everybody except a little old woman from Kalamazoo
Who gave out a long slow wail over what she was missing
because she was stone deaf

This is the tale of the Howdeehow powpow,
One of a thousand drolls the people tell of themselves,
Of tall corn, of wide rivers, of big snakes,
Of giants and dwarfs, heroes and clowns,
Grown in the soil of the mass of the people

3

In the long flat panhandle of Texas
far off on the grassland of the cattle country
near noon they sight a rider coming toward them
and the sky may be a cold neverchanging gray
or the sky may be changing its numbers
back and forth all day even and odd numbers
and the afternoon slides away somewhere
and they see their rider is alive yet
their rider is coming nearer yet
and they expect what happens and it happens again
he and his horse ride in late for supper
yet not too late
and night is on and the stars are out
and night too slides away somewhere
night too has even and odd numbers

The wind brings "a norther"
to the long flat panhandle
and in the shivering cold they say
 "Between Amarilla and the North Pole
 is only a barbwire fence,"
which they give a twist
 "Out here the only windbreak
 is the North Star"

4

THE people know what the land knows
the numbers odd and even of the land
the slow hot wind of summer and its withering
or again the crump of the driving white blizzard
and neither of them to be stopped
neither saying anything else than

“I’m not arguing I’m telling you”

The old timer on the desert was gray
and grizzled with ever seeing the sun

“For myself I don’t care whether it rains

I’ve seen it rain

But I’d like to have it rain

pretty soon sometime

Then my son could see it

He’s never seen it rain”

“Out here on the desert,”

said the first woman who said it,

“the first year you don’t believe

what others tell you

and the second year you don’t

believe what you tell yourself”

“I weave thee, I weave thee,”

sang the weaving Sonora woman

“I weave thee,

thou art for a Sonora fool”

And the fool spoke of her,

over wine mentioned her

“She can teach a pair of stilts to dance”

“What is the east? Have you been in the east?”

the New Jersey woman asked the little girl

the wee child growing up in Arizona who said

“Yes, I’ve been in the east,

the east is where trees come

between you and the sky.”

Another baby in Cleveland, Ohio,
in Cuyahoga County, Ohio—
why did she ask

“Papa,
what is the moon
supposed to advertise?”

And the boy in Winnetka, Illinois who wanted to know
“Is there a train so long you can’t count the cars?
Is there a blackboard so long it will hold all the numbers?”

What of the Athenian last year on whose bosom
a committee hung a medal to say to the world
here is a champion heavyweight poet?
He stood on a two-masted schooner
and flung his medal far out on the sea bosom

“And why not?
Has anybody ever given the ocean a medal?
Who of the poets equals the music of the sea?
And where is a symbol of the people
unless it is the sea?”

“Is it far to the next town?”
asked the Arkansas traveller
who was given the comfort
“It seems farther than it is
but you’ll find it ain’t”

Six feet six was Davy Tipton
and he had the proportions
as kingpin Mississippi River pilot
nearly filling the pilothouse
as he took the wheel with a laugh
“Big rivers ought to have big men”

On the homestretch of a racetrack
in the heart of the bluegrass country
in Lexington, Kentucky
they strewed the ashes of a man
who had so ordered in his will

He loved horses
and wanted his dust
in the flying hoofs of the homestretch

5

For sixty years the pine lumber barn
had held cows, horses, hay, harness, tools, junk,
amid the prairie winds of Knox County, Illinois
and the corn crops came and went, plows and wagons,
and hands milked, hands husked and harnessed
and held the leather reins of horse teams
in dust and dog days, in late fall sleet
till the work was done that fall
And the barn was a witness, stood and saw it all
"That old barn on your place, Charlie,
was nearly falling last time I saw it,
how is it now?"
"I got some poles to hold it on the east side
and the wind holds it up on the west"

6

And you take hold of a handle
by one hand or the other
by the better or worse hand
and you never know
maybe till long afterward
which was the better hand

And you give an anecdote
out of profound and moving forms of life
and one says you're an odd bird to tell it
and it was whimsical entertaining thank you
while another takes it as a valentine
and a fable not solved offhand
a text for two hours talk and
several cigars smoked—
You might say there never was a man who cut
off his nose to spite his face.

Yet the cartoon stands for several nations
and more than one ruler of a realm
Likewise the man who burned his barn to get
rid of the rats
Or the woman who said her "No" meant "Perhaps"
and her "Perhaps" meant "Yes"
Or Monte Cristo yes he was a case

Monte Cristo had a list, a little roll call
And one by one he took them each for a ride
Saying One and Two and Three and so on
Till the names were all crossed off
And he had cleansed the world of a given number
Of betrayers who had personally wronged him
He was judge, jury, and executioner,
On a par with Frankie who shot Johnnie,
Only far colder than Frankie
 "He created a solitude
 and called it peace"
He was cold, sure, and what they call elevated,
Meaning it was justice and not personal malice
Handing out stiff death with regards, compliments,
Calling each number like Nemesis in knickerbockers
 The show he put on was a little too good
 He was a lone wolf all on his own
 And Jesse James beat his record
And John Brown was a far more profound sketch,
John Brown who was locked up and didn't stay locked,
John Brown who was buried deep and didn't stay so

 In a Colorado graveyard
 two men lie in one grave
They shot it out in a jam over who owned
One corner lot over a piece of real estate
They shot it out it was a perfect duel
Each cleansed the world of the other
Each horizontal in an identical grave
Had his bones cleaned by the same maggots
They sleep now as two accommodating neighbors.
They had speed and no control
They wanted to go and didn't know where

"Revenge takes time and is a lot of bother,"
said a released convict who by the code
of Monte Cristo should have shot twelve
jurymen and hanged one judge and cruci-
fied one prosecuting attorney and hung by
thumbs two police officers and four prom-
inent citizens

"In my case," he added, "it pays to have a
good forgettery"

7

NEITHER wife nor child had Mr Eastman and the manner of his death
was peculiar

Around a fireplace in his home one night he entertained eight old friends,
saying to one woman at the door at eleven o'clock, "I'm leaving
you," she rejoining, "No, I'm leaving you"

But Mr Eastman, the kodak king of exactly how many millions he
wasn't sure, knew better as to whether he was leaving her or she him
After a good night of sleep and breakfast he met two lawyers and a sec-
retary, rearranging codicils in his will

And when they lingered and delayed about going, he said, "You must
be going, I have some writing to do,"

And they had a feeling, "Well, this is one of Mr Eastman's jokes, he
has always had his odd pleasantries"

And again Mr Eastman knew better than they that there was a little
writing to be done and nobody else could do it for him

They went—and Mr Eastman stepped into a bathroom, took his reliable
fountain pen and scribbled on a sheet of paper

"My work is finished Why wait?"

He had counted the years one by one up to seventy-seven, had come
through one paralytic stroke, had seen one lifelong friend reduced
by a series of strokes to childish play at papercutting four years in
bed and the integrity of the mind gone

He had a guess deep in his heart that if he lived he might change his
will, he could name cases, as the will now stood it was a keen dis-
persal for science, music, research, and with a changing mind he
might change his will

Cool he was about what he was doing for he had thought about it along
the slopes of the Genesee Valley of New York and along the coasts
of Africa and amid babbling apes of the jungle

He inspects in the bathroom an automatic revolver, a weapon tested
and trusted, loaded, oiled, operating
He takes a towel and wets it, placing it over the heart, the idea being that
in case he shoots himself there will be no soot nor splatter and a
clean piece of workmanship
His preparations are considered and thorough and he knows the credit
for the deed can never possibly go to anyone but himself
Then he steps out, the hammer falls, he crosses over, takes the last barrier
He knows thereafter no console organist will call of a morning to play
Bach or Handel while he eats breakfast
His last testament stands secure against the childishness of second child
hood

8

MILDRED KLINGHOFER whirled through youth in bloom
One baby came and was taken away, another came and was taken away
From her windows she saw the cornrows young and green
And later the final stand of the corn and the huddled shocks
And the blue mist of a winter thaw deepening at evening
In her middle forties her first husband died
In her middle sixties her second husband died
In her middle seventies her third husband died
And she died at mid-eighty with her fourth husband at the bedside
Thus she had known an editor, a lawyer, a grocer, a retired farmer
To the first of them she had borne two children she had hungered for
And deep in her had stayed a child hunger
In the last hours when her mind wandered, she cried imperiously, "My
baby! give me my baby!"
And her cries for this child, born of her mind, in her final moments of
life, went on and on
When they answered, "Your baby isn't here" or "Your baby is coming
soon if you will wait," she kept on with her cry, "My baby! let me
hold my baby!"
And they made a rag doll
And laid it in her arms
And she clutched it as a mother would
And she was satisfied and her second childhood ended like her first,
with a doll in her arms

There are dreams stronger than death
Men and women die holding these dreams

Yes, "stronger than death" let the hammers beat on this slogan
Let the sea wash its salt against it and the blizzards drive wind and winter
at it
Let the undersea sharks try to break this bronze murmur
Let the gentle bush dig its root deep and spread upward to split one boulder
Blame the frustrate? Some of them have lived stronger than death
Blame only the smug and scrupulous beyond reproach
Who made the guess Shakespeare died saying his best plays didn't get
written?
Who swindles himself more deeply than the one saying, "I am holier than
thou"?

"I love you,"
said a great mother
"I love you for what you are
knowing so well what you are
And I love you more yet, child,
deeper yet than ever, child,
for what you are going to be,
knowing so well you are going far,
knowing your great works are ahead,
ahead and beyond,
yonder and far over yet"

9

A FATHER sees a son nearing manhood
What shall he tell that son?
"Life is hard, be steel, be a rock"
And this might stand him for the storms
and serve him for humdrum and monotony
and guide him amid sudden betrayals
and tighten him for slack moments.
"Life is a soft loam, be gentle, go easy"
And this too might serve him
Brutes have been gentled where lashes failed
The growth of a frail flower in a path up
has sometimes shattered and split a rock.
A tough will counts So does desire

So does a rich soft wanting
Without rich wanting nothing arrives
Tell him too much money has killed men
and left them dead years before burial
the quest of lucre beyond a few easy needs
has twisted good enough men
sometimes into dry thwarted worms
Tell him time as a stuff can be wasted
Tell him to be a fool every so often
and to have no shame over having been a fool
yet learning something out of every folly
hoping to repeat none of the cheap follies
thus arriving at intimate understanding
of a world numbering many fools
Tell him to be alone often and get at himself
and above all tell himself no lies about himself
whatever the white lies and protective fronts
he may use amongst other people
Tell him solitude is creative if he is strong
and the final decisions are made in silent rooms
Tell him to be different from other people
if it comes natural and easy being different
Let him have lazy days seeking his deeper motives
Let him seek deep for where he is a born natural.
Then he may understand Shakespeare
and the Wright brothers, Pasteur, Pavlov,
Michael Faraday and free imaginations
bringing changes into a world resenting change
He will be lonely enough
to have time for the work
he knows as his own

10

THE Australian mounted infantryman now teaches
in a western state college
Once he studied at the University of Heidelberg
and took a doctor's degree
Once he slept on newspapers, pink sheets, three
weeks in Grant Park, Chicago

Keeping a tight hold on his certificate awarded
by the University of Heidelberg
Once he lived six weeks in a tent looking in the
face the Great Sphinx of Egypt
Once of a morning shaving he happened to ask the
battered and worndown Sphinx,
“What would you say if I should ask you to tell
me something worth telling?”
And the Sphinx broke its long silence
“Don’t expect too much”

11

AN Englishman in the old days
presented the Empress of Russia
with a life-sized flea made of gold
and it could hop

She asked the court
“What can we Russians do
to equal this marvel?”

A Minister took it away
and brought it back soon after
He had seen to it
and had the monogram of the Empress
engraved on each foot of the flea
though it would no longer hop

This is a case in point
as told by Salzman
who came from the Caucasus
and had it from a man who was there

In Tiflis, his home town,
Salzman knew a merchant
who stood in the front door
and spoke to passers-by,
to possible customers
“Come inside.

We've got everything—
even bird's milk ”

And this merchant weighed his hand
along with what he sold his patrons
and each evening after business hours
he threw holy water on his hand
saying, “Cleanse thyself, cleanse thyself ”

Among the peasants Salzman heard
“He should be the owner of the land
who rubs it between his hands every spring ”

Wood rangers in the forest of the czar
came in and talked all night
They spoke of forest sounds
“The cry of a virgin tree at its first cut
of the ax stays in the air
“The sound of the blow that kills a snake
is in the air till sundown
“The cry of the child wrongfully punished
stays in the air.”

And this was in the old days
and they are a fine smoke
a thin smoke

The people move
in a fine thin smoke,
the people, yes

1 2

THE scaffolding holds the arch in place
till the keystone is put in to stay
Then the scaffolding comes out
Then the arch stands strong as all the
massed pressing parts of the arch
and loose as any sag or spread
failing of the builders' intention, hope

"The arch never sleeps"
Living in union it holds
So long as each piece does its work
the arch is alive, singing, a restless choral

13

THE outstraw green turns gold turns ashen and
prepares for snow
The earth and the grass hold grand international
confabulations with the sun
Along the Arkansas or the Po grass testifies to
loam of earth alive yet
The rivers of the earth run into the sea, return
in fog and rain alive yet
The shuttlings go on between field and sky and
keep corn potatoes beans alive yet
The Illinois corn leaves spoken to in high winds
run in sea waves of sun silver
Alive yet the spillover of last night's moonrise
brought returns of peculiar cash
a cash of thin air alive yet

On the shores of Lake Michigan
high on a wooden pole, in a box,
two purple martins had a home
and taken away down to Martinique
and let loose, they flew home,
thousands of miles to be home again
And this has lights of wonder
echo and pace and echo again
The birds let out began flying
north north-by-west north
till they were back home
How their instruments told them
of ceiling, temperature, air pressure,
how their control-boards gave them
reports of fuel, ignition, speeds,
is out of the record, out
Across spaces of sun and cloud,
in rain and fog, through air pockets,

wind with them, wind against them,
stopping for subsistence rations,
whirling in gust and spiral,
these people of the air,
these children of the wind,
had a sense of where to go and how,
how to go north north-by-west north,
till they came to one wooden pole,
till they were home again

And this has lights of wonder
echo and pace and echo again
for other children, other people, yes

The red ball of the sun in an evening mist
Or the slow fall of rain on planted fields
Or the pink sheath of a newborn child
Or the path of a child's mouth to a nipple
Or the snuggle of a bear cub in mother paws
Or the structural weave of the universe
Witnessed in a moving frame of winter stars—
These hold affidavits of struggle

14

THE people is Everyman, everybody
Everybody is you and me and all others
What everybody says is what we all say
And what is it we all say?

Where did we get these languages?
Why is your baby-talk deep in your blood?
What is the cling of the tongue
To what it heard with its mother-milk?

They cross on the ether now
They travel on high frequencies
Over the border-lines and barriers
Of mountain ranges and oceans
When shall we all speak the same language?
And do we want to have all the same language?
Are we learning a few great signs and passwords?

Why should Everyman be lost for words?
The questions are put every day in every tongue
 "Where you from, Stranger?
 Where were you born?
 Got any money?
 What do you work at?
 Where's your passport?
 Who are your people?"

Over the ether crash the languages
 And the people listen
As on the plain of Howdeehow they listen
 They want to hear
They will be told when the next war is ready
The long wars and the short wars will come on the air,
How many got killed and how the war ended
And who got what and the price paid
And how there were tombs for the Unknown Soldier,
 The boy nobody knows the name of,
The boy whose great fame is that of the masses,
The millions of names too many to write on a tomb,
The heroes, the cannonfodder, the living targets,
The mutilated and sacred dead,
The people, yes

Two countries with two flags
are nevertheless one land, one blood, one people—
 can this be so?
And the earth belongs to the family of man?
 can this be so?

The first world war came and its cost was laid on the people.
The second world war—the third—what will be the cost?
And will it repay the people for what they pay?

15

FROM the people the countries get their armies
By the people the armies are fed, clothed, armed
Out of the smoke and ashes of the war

The people build again their two countries with two flags
Even though sometimes it is one land, one blood, one people

Hate is a vapor fixed and mixed
Hate is a vapor blown and thrown
And the war lasts till the hate dies down
And the crazy Four Horsemen have handed the people
Hunger and filth and a stink too heavy to stand
Then the earth sends forth bright new grass
And the land begins to breathe easy again
Though the hate of the people dies slow and hard
Hate is a lingering heavy swamp mist

And the bloated horse carcass points four feet to the sky
And the tanks and caterpillar tractors are buried deep in shell holes
And rust flakes the big guns and time rots the gas masks on skeleton faces
Deep in the dirt the dynamite threw them with an impersonal detonation
war is "Oh!" and "Ah!" war is "Ugh!"

And after the strife of war
begins the strife of peace

16

HOPE is a tattered flag and a dream out of time
Hope is a heartspun word, the rainbow, the shadblow in white,
The evening star inviolable over the coal mines,
The shimmer of northern lights across a bitter winter night,
The blue hills beyond the smoke of the steel works,
The birds who go on singing to their mates in peace, war, peace,
The ten-cent crocus bulb blooming in a used-car salesroom,
The horseshoe over the door, the luckpiece in the pocket,
The kiss and the comforting laugh and resolve—
Hope is an echo, hope ties itself yonder, yonder

The spring grass showing itself where least expected,
The rolling fluff of white clouds on a changeable sky,
The broadcast of strings from Japan, bells from Moscow,
Of the voice of the prime minister of Sweden earned
Across the sea in behalf of a world family of nations

And children singing chorals of the Christ child
 And Bach being broadcast from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
 And tall skyscrapers practically empty of tenants
 And the hands of strong men groping for handholds
 And the Salvation Army singing God loves us

17

"THE people is a myth, an abstraction"
 And what myth would you put in place
 of the people?
 And what abstraction would you exchange
 for this one?
 And when has creative man not toiled
 deep in myth?
 And who fights for a bellyful only and
 where is any name worth remembering
 for anything else than the human ab-
 straction woven through it with in-
 visible thongs?
 "Precisely who and what is the people?"
 Is this far off from asking what is grass?
 what is salt? what is the sea? what is
 loam?
 What are seeds? what is a crop? why must
 mammals have milk soon as born or they
 perish?
 And how did that alfalfaland governor
 mean it "The common people is a mule
 that will do anything you say except
 stay hitched"?

18

LET the nickels and dimes explain
 They are made for the people
 Millions every day study the buffalo on the nickel,
 Study the torch of liberty on the dime
 And the words "In God We Trust,"
 Study before spending the nickel, the dime,

For a handkerchief, a mousetrap, a bowl of soup
These with their nickels and dimes
Bring the street its roar and whirl,
These in their wants and spending,
These are the bottom pedestals of steel-ribbed skyscrapers
These are the buyers and payers whose mass flood of nickels
and dimes is a life stream of a system

And how come the hey-you-
-listen-to-this billboard, the you-can't-
-get-away-from-this electric sign, the
show window robots and dummies, the loud-
speaker clamor, the bargains brandished
with slambang hoots and yells, nods and
winks, gee-whizz sales?

The liar in print who first lies to you
about your health and then lies about
what will fix it, the scare liar who hopes
his lies will scare you into buying what
he is lying about,

The better-than-all-others liar, the easy-pay-
ments liar, the greatest-on-earth liar, the
get-rich-quick liar

Befouling words and mutilating language and
feeding rubbish and filth to the human mind
for the sake of sales, selling whatever can
be sold for a profit—

Out of this seething whirl, this merciless fight
of the selling game, what happens to buyers
and sellers? why does the question rise

“How can you compete with a skunk?”

The endless lines of women buying steel-wool dishrags are among the
people, the customers, the mass buyers who pay
For the barons and counts the American girl goes shopping for, trying
one and another

“What is doing in dukes today and how much for a marquis a markee?”
asks the chain store princess, the daughter of the railroad reorgani-
zation looter,

While the shoppers and commuters who constitute their meal tickets

pick the asles amid frying pans, flannelette apparel, leatherette notions, genuine toys and imitation jewelry

Out of the needs of life and the wants of the people rises a jungle of tall possessions bewildering to its owners and their sons and daughters who step in when the will is read and say, "Now it's ours"

From then on the bank and its branches appurtenant thereto, the mills and mines, the patents, the oil wells and pipe lines, the monopoly rights, the coast-to-coast chain of stores, belong to the new generation,

To a daughter sometimes nothing special, just another cutie, to a son who knows neckties and chorines and wisecracks at parting, "Abyssinia"

Out of this ngamarole come czars of definite domains, owners of control saying, "We don't have to own it What's ownership anyhow if we hold control and the affiliates and subsidiaries of the main holding company are fixed our way?"

19

THE people, yes, the people,
Everyone who got a letter today
And those the mail-carrier missed,
The women at the cookstoves preparing meals,
in a sewing corner mending, in a basement
laundering, woman the homemaker,
The women at the factory tending a stitching
machine, some of them the mainstay of the
jobless man at home cooking, laundering,
Streetwalking jobhunters, walkers alive and keen,
sleepwalkers drifting along, the stupefied and
hopeless down-and-outs, the game fighters
who will die fighting,
Walkers reading signs and stopping to study
windows, the signs and windows aimed
straight at their eyes, their wants,
Women in and out of doors to look and feel, to
try on, to buy and take away, to order and
have it charged and delivered, to pass by on
account of price and conditions,
The shopping crowds, the newspaper circulation,

the bystanders who witness parades, who
meet the boat, the train, who throng in
wavelines to a fire, an explosion, an accident—
The people, yes—

Their shoe soles wearing holes in stone steps, their
hands and gloves wearing soft niches in ban-
isters of granite, two worn foot-tracks at the
general-delivery window,

Driving their cars, stop and go, red light, green
light, and the law of the traffic cop's fingers,
on their way, loans and mortgages, margins to
cover,

Payments on the car, the bungalow, the radio, the
electric icebox, accumulated interest on loans
for past payments, the writhing point of
where the money will come from,

Crime thrown in their eyes from every angle,
crimes against property and person, crime in
the prints and films, crime as a lurking
shadow ready to spring into reality, crime as
a method and a technic,

Comedy as an offset to crime, the laughmakers,
the odd numbers in the news and the movies,
original clowns and imitators, and in the best
you never know what's coming next even
when it's hokum,

And sports, how a muff in the seventh lost yes-
terday's game and now they are learning to
hit Dazzy's fadeaway ball and did you hear
how Foozly plowed through that line for a
touchdown this afternoon?

And daily the death toll of the speed wagons, a
cripple a minute in fenders, wheels, steel and
glass splinters, a stammering witness before a
coroner's jury, "It happened so sudden I
don't know what happened"

And in the air a decree life is a gamble, take a
chance, you pick a number and see what you
get anything can happen in this sweepstakes
around the corner may be prosperity or the

worst depression yet who knows? nobody
you pick a number, you draw a card, you
shoot the bones

In the poolrooms the young hear, "Ashes to
ashes, dust to dust, If the women don't get
you then the whiskey must," and in the
churches, "We walk by faith and not by sight,"
Often among themselves in their sessions of can-
dor the young saying, "Everything's a racket,
only the gyp artists get by"

And over and beyond the latest crime or comedy
always that relentless meal ticket saying
dont-lose-me, hold your job, glue your mind
on that job or when your last nickel is gone
you live on your folks or sign for relief,

And the terror of these unknowns is a circle of
black ghosts holding men and women in toil
and danger, and sometimes shame, beyond
the dreams of their blossom days, the days
before they set out on their own

What is this "occupational disease" we hear
about? It's a sickness that breaks your health
on account of the work you're in That's all
Another kind of work and you'd have been
as good as any of them You'd have been
your old self

And what is this "hazardous occupation"? Why
that's where you're liable to break your neck
or get smashed on the job so you're no good
on that job any more and that's why you
can't get any regular life insurance so long as
you're on that job

These are heroes then—among the plain people—
Heroes, did you say? And why not? They
give all they've got and ask no questions and
take what comes and what more do you
want?

On the street you can see them any time, some
with jobs, some nothing doing, here a down-
and-out, there a game fighter who will die
fighting

20

- Who shall speak for the people?
Who knows the works from A to Z
so he can say, "I know what the
people want"? Who is this phenom?
where did he come from?
- When have the people been half as rotten
as what the panderers to the people
dangle before crowds?
- When has the fiber of the people been as
shoddy as what is sold to the people
by cheaters?
- What is it the panderers and cheaters of
the people play with and trade on?
- The credulity of believers and hopers—and
when is a heart less of a heart because
of belief and hope?
- What is the tremulous line between credu-
lity on the one side and on the other
the hypotheses and illusions of inven-
tors, discoverers, navigators who chart
their course by what they hope and
believe is beyond the horizon?
- What is a stratosphere fourteen miles from
the earth or a sunken glass house on
the sea-bottom amid fish and feather-
stars unless a bet that man can shove
on beyond yesterday's record of man
the hoper, the believer?
- How like a sublime sanctuary of human
credulity is that room where amid
tubes, globes and retorts they shoot
with heavy hearts of hydrogen and
batter with fire-streams of power hop-
ing to smash the atom
- Who are these bipeds trying to take apart
the atom and isolate its electrons and
make it tell why it is what it is? Be-
lievers and hopers

Let the work of their fathers and elder
brothers be cancelled this instant and
what would happen?

Nothing—only every tool, bus, car, light,
torch, bulb, print, film, instrument or
communication depending for its life
on electrodynamic power would stop
and stand dumb and silent

2 1

Who knows the people, the migratory harvest hands and berry pickers,
the loan shark victims, the installment house wolves,
The jugglers in sand and wood who smooth their hands along the mold
that casts the frame of your motorcar engine,
The metal polishers, solderers, and paint-spray hands who put the final
finish on the car,
The riveters and bolt-catchers, the cowboys of the air in the big city, the
cowhands of the Great Plains, the ex-convicts, the bellhops, redcaps,
lavatory men—
The union organizer with his list of those ready to join and those hesi-
tating, the secret paid informers who report every move toward or-
ganizing,
The house-to-house canvassers, the doorbell ringers, the good-morning-
have-you-heard boys, the strike pickets, the strikebreakers, the hired
sluggers, the ambulance crew, the ambulance chasers, the picture
chasers, the meter readers, the oysterboat crews, the harborlight
tenders—
who knows the people?

Who knows this from pit to peak? The people, yes

2 2

THE people is a lighted believer and
hoper—and this is to be held against
them?

The panderers and cheaters are to have
their way in trading on these lights
of the people?

Not always, no, not always, for the people
 is a knower too
 With Johansson steel blocks the people
 can measure itself as a knower
 Knowing what it knows today with a deeper
 knowing than ever
 Knowing in millionths and billionths of
 an inch
 Knowing in the mystery of one automatic
 machine expertly shaping for your eyes
 another automatic machine
 Knowing in traction, power-shafts, transmis-
 sion, twist drills, grinding, gears—
 Knowing in the night air mail, the news-
 reel flicker, the broadcasts from Tokyo,
 Shanghai, Bombay and Somaliland—
 The people a knower whose knowing
 grows by what it feeds on
 The people wanting to know more, wanting
 The birds of the air and the fish of the sea
 leave off where man begins

23

"THE kindest and gentlest here are the
 murderers," said the penitentiary warden
 "I killed the man because I loved him,"
 said the woman the police took yesterday
 "I had such a good time," said the woman leaving a movie theater with
 tears in her eyes "It was a swell picture"
 "A divorced man goes and marnes the same kind of a woman he is just
 nd of," said the lawyer
 "Life is a gigantic fake," read the farewell note of the high school boy
 who killed himself
 "I pick jurors with nonconvicting faces,"
 said the lawyer who usually cleared his man
 "We earn and we earn and all that we earn goes into the grave," said the
 basement-dwelling mother who had lost six of her eight children from
 the white plague
 "Don't mourn for me but organize," said the Utah I W W before a firing

squad executed sentence of death on him, his last words running
 "Let her go!"
 "Look out or you'll be ready for one of these one-man bungalows with
 silver handles," laughed the traffic cop
 "Tie your hat to the saddle and let's ride,"
 yelled one in a five-gallon hat in Albuquerque
 "If I never see you again don't think the time long," smiled an old timer
 in Wyoming moonlight
 On tiptoe and whispering so no one else could hear, a little girl at Browns-
 ville spoke into the ear of the chief executive of the great State of
 Texas "How does it feel to be Governor?"
 Why when the stock crash came did the man in black silk pajamas let
 himself headfirst off a fire escape down ten floors to a stone sidewalk?
 His sixty million dollars had shrunk to ten million and he didn't see
 how he could get along
 "If she was a wicked witch she wouldn't say so, she would be so wicked
 she wouldn't know it," said little Anne
 "God will forgive me, it's his line of business,"
 said the dying German-Jewish poet in his garret

The little girl saw her first troop parade and asked,
 "What are those?"
 "Soldiers"
 "What are soldiers?"
 "They are for war They fight and each tries to kill
 as many of the other side as he can"
 The girl held still and studied
 "Do you know I know something?"
 "Yes, what is it you know?"
 "Sometime they'll give a war and nobody will come"

One of the early Chicago poets,
 One of the slouching underslung Chicago poets,
 Having only the savvy God gave him,
 Lacking a gat, lacking brass knucks,
 Having one lead pencil to spare, wrote
 "I am credulous about the destiny of man,
 and I believe more than I can ever prove
 of the future of the human race
 and the importance of illusions,

the value of great expectations
I would like to be in the same moment
an earthworm (which I am) and
a rider to the moon (which I am)"

24

Who shall speak for the people?
who has the answers?
where is the sure interpreter?
who knows what to say?
Who can write the music jazz-classical
smokestacks-geraniums hyacinths-biscuits
now whispering easy
now boom doom crashing angular
now tough monotonous tom tom
Who has enough split-seconds and slow sea-tides?

The ships of the sea and the mists of
night and the sheen of old battle-
fields and the moon on the city
rubbish dumps belong to the people
The crops this year, last and next year,
and the winds and frosts in many
orchards and tomato gardens, are
listed in the people's acquaintance
Horses and wagons, trucks and tractors,
from the shouting cities to the sleep-
ing prairies, from worn pavements
to mountain mule paths, the people
have strange possessions
The plow and the hammer, the knife and
the shovel, the planting hoe and the
reaping sickle, everywhere these are
the people's possessions by right of
use
Their handles are smoothed to the grain
of the wood by the enclosing
thumbs and fingers of familiar
hands,

Maintenance-of-way men in a Tennessee
gang singing, "If I die a railroad
man put a pick and shovel at my
head and my feet and a nine-pound
hammer in my hand,"

Larry, the Kansas section boss, on his
dying bed asking for one last look at
the old hand-car,

His men saying in the coffin on his chest
he should by rights have the spike
maul, the gauge and the old claw-bar

The early morning in the fields, the
brown thrush warbling and the imi-
tations of the catbird, the neverend-
ing combat with pest and destroyer,
the chores of feeding and watching,
seedtime and harvest,

The clocking of the months toward a
birthing day, the newly dropped
calves and the finished steers loaded
in stock-cars for market, the gamble
on what we'll get tomorrow for
what we put in today—

These are belongings of the people, dusty
with the dust of earth, merciless as
sudden hog cholera, hopeful as a
rainwashed hill of moonlit pines

25

"You do what you must—this world and then the next—one world at a
time"

The grain gamblers and the price manipulators and the stock-market
players put their own twist on the text In the sweat of thy brow shalt
thou eat thy bread

The day's work in the factory, mill, mine—the whistle, the bell, the alarm
clock, the timekeeper and the paycheck, your number on the assembly
line, what the night shift says when the day shift comes—the blood

of years paid out for finished products proclaimed on billboards yelling at highway travellers in green valleys—
These are daily program items, values of blood and mind in the everyday rituals of the people

26

You can drum on immense drums
the monotonous daily motions of the people
taking from earth and air
their morsels of bread and love,
a carryover from yesterday into tomorrow

You can blow on great brass horns
the awful clamors of war and revolution
when swarming anonymous shadowshapes
obliterate old names Big Names
and cross out what was
and offer what is on a fresh blank page

27

In the folded and quiet yesterdays
Put down in the book of the past
Is a scrawl of scrawny thumbs
And a smudge of clutching fingers
And the breath of hanged men,
Of thieves and vagabonds,
Of killers saying welcome as an ax fell,
Of traitors cut in four pieces
And their bowels thrust over their faces
According to the ancient Anglo-Saxon
Formula for the crime of treason,
Of persons covered with human filth
In due exaction of a penalty,
Of ears clipped, noses slit, fingers chopped
For the identification of vagrants,
Of loiterers and wanderers seared
“with a hot iron in the breast the mark V,”
Of violence as a motive lying deep
As the weather changes of the sea,

Of gang wars, tong wars, civil tumults,
Industrial strife, international mass murders,
Of agitators outlawed to live on thistles,
Of thongs for holding plainspoken men,
Of thought and speech being held a crime,
And a woman burned for saying,
"I listen to my Voices and obey them,"
And a thinker locked into stone and iron
 For saying, "The earth moves,"
 And the pity of men learning by shocks,
 By pain and practice,
 By plunges and struggles in a bitter pool

 In the folded and quiet yesterdays
 how many times has it happened?
The leaders of the people estimated as to price
And bought with bribes signed and delivered
Or waylaid and shot or meshed by perjurers
Or hunted and sent into hiding
Or taken and paraded in garments of dung,
Fire applied to their footsoles
 "Now will you talk?"
Their mouths basted with rubber hose
 "Now will you talk?"
Thrown into solitary, fed on slops, hung by thumbs,
Till the mention of that uprising is casual, so-so,
As though the next revolt breeds somewhere
In the bowels of that mystic behemoth, the people
"And when it comes again," say watchers, "we are ready"
 How many times
 in the folded and quiet yesterdays
 has it happened?

 "You may burn my flesh and bones
 and throw the ashes to the four winds,"
 smiled one of them,
 "Yet my voice shall linger on
 and in the years yet to come
 the young shall ask what was the idea
 for which you gave me death

and what was I saying
that I must die for what I said?"

28

In the days of the cockade and the brass pistol
Fear of the people brought the debtors' jail
The creditor said, "Pay me or go to prison,"
And men lacking property lacked ballots and citizenship
Into the Constitution of the United States they wrote a fear
In the form of "checks and balances," "proper restraints"
On the people so whimsical and changeable,
So variable in mood and weather

Lights of tallow candles fell on lawbooks by night
The woolspun clothes came from sheep near by
Men of "solid substance" wore velvet knickerbockers
And shared snuff with one another in greetings
One of these made a name for himself with saying
You could never tell what was coming next from the people
"Your people, sir, your people is a great beast,"
Speaking for those afraid of the people,
Afraid of sudden massed action of the people,
The people being irresponsible with torch, gun and rope,
The people being a child with fire and loose hardware,
The people listening to leather-lunged stump orators
Crying the rich get richer, the poor poorer, and why?
The people undependable as prairie rivers in floodtime,
The people uncertain as lights on the face of the sea
Wherefore high and first of all he would write
God, the Constitution, Property Rights, the Army and the Police,
After these the rights of the people

The meaning was
The people having nothing to lose take chances
The people having nothing to take care of are careless
The people lacking property are slack about property
Having no taxes to pay how can they consider taxes?
"And the poor have they not themselves to blame for their poverty?"

Those who have must take care of those who have not
 Even though in the providence of events some of
 Those who now have *not* once *had* and what they had *then*
 Was taken away from them by those who now *have*

Naughts are naughts into ruffraff
 Nothing plus nothing equals nothing
 Scum is scum and dregs are dregs
 "This flotsam and jetsam "

There is the House of Have and the House of Have-Not
 God named the Haves as caretakers of the Have-Nots
 This shepherding is a divine decree laid on the betters
 "And surely you know when you are among your betters?"

This and a lot else was in the meaning
 "Your people, sir, is a great beast "
 The testament came with deliberation
 Cold as ice, warm as blood,
 Hard as a steel hand steel-gloved,
 A steel foot steel-shod
 for contact with another testament
 "All men are born free and equal "
 The cow content to give milk and calves,
 The plug work-horse plowing from dawn till dark,
 The mule lashed with a blacksnake when balking—
 Fed and sheltered—or maybe not—all depending—
 A pet monkey leaping for nuts thrown to it,
 A parrot ready to prattle your words
 And repeat after you your favorite oaths—
 Or a nameless monster to be guarded and tended
 Against temper and flashes of retaliation—
 These were the background symbols
 "Your people, sir, is a great beast "

29

THE people, yes—
 Born with bones and heart fused in deep and violent secrets
 Mixed from a bowl of sky blue dreams and sea slime facts—
 A seething of saints and sinners, toilers, loafers, oxen, apes

In a womb of superstition, faith, genius, crime, sacrifice—
The one and only source of armies, navies, work gangs,
The living flowing breath of the history of nations,
Of the little Family of Man hugging the little ball of Earth,
And a long hall of mirrors, straight, convex and concave,
Moving and endless with scrolls of the living,
Shimmering with phantoms flung from the past,
Shot over with lights of babies to come, not yet here

The honorable orators, the *gazettes* of thunder,
The tycoons, big shots and dictators,
Flicker in the mirrors a few moments
And fade through the glass of death
For discussion in an autocracy of worms
While the rootholds of the earth nourish the majestic people
And the new generations with names never heard of
Plow deep in broken drums and shoot craps for old crowns,
Shouting unimagined shibboleths and slogans,
Tracing their heels in moth-eaten insignia of bawdy leaders—
Piling revolt on revolt across night valleys,
Letting loose insurrections, uprisings, strikes,
Marches, mass-meetings, banners, declared resolves,
Plodding in a somnambulism of fog and rain
Till a given moment exploded by long-prepared events—
Then again the overthrow of an old order
And the trials of another new authority
And death and taxes, crops and droughts,
Chinch bugs, grasshoppers, corn borers, boll weevils,
Top soil farms blown away in a dust and wind,
Inexorable rains carrying off rich loam,
And mortgages, house rent, groceries,
Jobs, pay cuts, layoffs, relief
And passion and poverty and crime
And the paradoxes not yet resolved
Of the shrewd and elusive proverbs,
The have-you-heard yarns,
The listen-to-this anecdote
Made by the people out of the roots of the earth,
Out of dirt, barns, workshops, timetables,
Out of lumberjack payday jamborees,

Out of joybells and headaches the day after,
Out of births, weddings, accidents,
Out of wars, laws, promises, betrayals,
Out of mists of the lost and anonymous,
Out of plain living, early rising and spare belongings

30

WE'LL see what we'll see
Time is a great teacher
Today me and tomorrow maybe you
This old anvil laughs at many broken hammers
What is bitter to stand against today may be sweet to remember tomorrow
Fine words butter no parsnips Moonlight dries no mittens
Whether the stone bumps the jug or the jug bumps the stone it is bad
for the jug
One hand washes the other and both wash the face
Better leave the child's nose dirty than wring it off
We all belong to the same big family and have the same smell
Handling honey, tar or dung some of it sticks to the fingers
The liar comes to believe his own lies
He who burns himself must sit on the blisters
God alone understands fools
The dumb mother understands the dumb child
To work hard, to live hard, to die hard, and then to go to hell after all
would be too damned hard
You can fool all the people part of the time and part of the people all the
time but you can't fool all of the people all of the time
It takes all kinds of people to make a world

What is bred in the bone will tell
Between the inbreds and the cross-breeds the argu-
ment goes on
You can breed them up as easy as you can breed
them down
"I don't know who my ancestors were," said a
mongrel, "but we've been descending for a
long time"
"My ancestors," said the Cherokee-blooded Okla-
homan, "didn't come over in the *Mayflower*
but we was there to meet the boat"

"Why," said the Denver Irish policeman as he
arrested a Pawnee Indian I W W soapboxer,
"why don't you go back where you came from?"

An expert is only a damned fool a long ways from home
You're either a thoroughbred, a scrub, or an in-between
Speed is born with the foal—sometimes
Always some dark horse never heard of before is coming under the wire
a winner
A thoroughbred always wins against a scrub, though you never know for
sure even thoroughbreds have their off days new blood tells the
wornout thoroughbreds lose to the fast young scrubs

There is a luck of faces and bloods
Comes to a child and touches it
It comes like a bird never seen
It goes like a bird never handled
There are little mothers hear the bird,
Feel the fitting of wings never seen,
And the touch of the givers of luck,
The bringers of faces and bloods

31

"Your low birth puts you beneath me,"
said Harmodius, Iphicrates replying,
"The difference between us is this
My family begins with me
Yours ends with you"

"A long, tall man won't always make a good fireman," said the Santa Fé
engineer to a couple of other rails deadheading back "Out of a dozen
wants to be firemen you can pick 'em Take one of these weakly
fellers he'll do his best but he's all gone time you get nine miles
Take a short, stout feller, low down so he can get at his coal, and he'll
beat one of those tall fellers has to stoop But if a tall feller's got long
arms he can do wonders I knowed one engineer used to say he had
a fireman he never saw him throw a shovel of coal on the fire—his
arms was so long he just reached and laid the coal on!"

He can turn around on a dime
He has an automobile thirst and a wheelbarrow income

I don't know where I'm going but I'm on my way
 I'll knock you so high in the air you'll starve coming down
 A bonanza is a hole in the ground owned by a champion liar
 All you get from him you can put in your eye
 He tried to get a bird in the hand and two in the bush but what he got
 was a horse of another color
 If the government tried to pay me for what I don't know there wouldn't
 be enough money in all the mints to pay me
 You can't tell him anything because he thinks he knows more now than
 he gets paid for
 It's a slow burg—I spent a couple of weeks there one day
 He bit off more than he could chew
 Don't take a mouthful bigger than your mouth
 Let's take it apart to see how it ticks
 If we had a little ham we could have some ham and eggs if we had some
 eggs
 He always takes off his hat when he mentions his own name
 What's the matter with him? The big I, always the big I
 "Why didn't you zigzag your car and miss him?" "He was zigzagging him-
 self and outguessed me"
 "Are you guilty or not guilty?" "What else have you?"
 "Are you guilty or not guilty?" "I stands mute"

32

WHAT the people learn out of lifting and hauling and waiting and losing
 and laughing
 Goes into a scroll, an almanac, a record folding and unfolding, and the
 music goes down and around
 The story goes on and on, happens, forgets to happen, goes out and meets
 itself coming in, puts on disguises and drops them
 "Yes yes, go on, go on, I'm listening" You hear that in one doorway.
 And in the next, "Aw shut up, close your trap, button your tongue, you
 talk too much"
 The people, yes, the people,
 To the museum, the aquarium, the planetarium, the zoo, they go by
 thousands, coming away to talk about mummies, camels, fish and
 stars,
 The police and constables holding every one of them either a lawbreaker
 or lawabiding

The fingerprint expert swears no two of them ever has finger lines and
circlings the same

The handwriting expert swears no one of them ever writes his name twice
the same way

To the grocer and the banker they are customers, depositors, investors
The politician counts them as voters, the newspaper editor as readers, the
gambler as suckers

The priest holds each one an immortal soul in the care of Almighty God
 bright accidents from the chromosome
 spill from the color bowl of the
 chromosomes some go under in early
 bubbles some learn from desert blos-
 soms how to lay up and use thin
 hoardings of night mist

In an old French town
the mayor ordered the people
to hang lanterns in front of their houses
which the people did
but the lanterns gave no light
so the mayor ordered they must
put candles in the lanterns
which the people did
but the candles in the lanterns gave no light
whereupon the mayor ordered
they must light the candles in the lanterns
which the people did
and thereupon there was light

The cauliflower is a cabbage with a college education
All she needs for housekeeping is a can opener

They'll fly high if you give them wings
Put all your eggs in one basket and watch that basket
Everybody talks about the weather and nobody does anything about it
The auk flies backward so as to see where it's been

Handle with care women and glass

Women and linen look best by candlelight

One hair of a woman draws more than a team of horses

Blessed are they who expect nothing for they shall not be disappointed

You can send a boy to college but you can't make him think

The time to sell is when you have a customer
Sell the buffalo hide after you have killed the buffalo
The more you fill a barrel the more it weighs unless you fill it with holes
A pound of iron or a pound of feathers weighs the same
Those in fear they may cast pearls before swine are often lacking in pearls
May you live to eat the hen that scratches over your grave
He seems to think he's the frog's tonsils but he looks to me like a plugged nickel
If you don't like the coat bring back the vest and I'll give you a pair of pants
The coat and the pants do the work but the vest gets the gravy
"You are singing an invitation to summer," said the teacher, "you are not defying it to come"

"Sargeant, if a private calls you
a dam fool, what of it?"
"I'd throw him in the guard house"
"And if he just thinks you're a dam
fool and don't say it, then what?"
"Nothing"
"Well, let it go at that"

The white man drew a small circle in the sand
and told the red man, "This is what the Indian
knows," and drawing a big circle around the
small one, "This is what the white man knows"
The Indian took the stick and swept an immense
ring around both circles "This is where the
white man and the red man know nothing"

On the long dirt road from Nagadoches to Austin
The pioneer driving a yoke of oxen and a cart
met a heavy man in a buggy driving a team
of glossy black horses

"I am Sam Houston, Governor of the State of Texas,
and I order you to turn out of the road for me"
"I am an American citizen and a taxpayer of Texas
and I have as much right to the road as you"
"That is an intelligent answer and I salute you
and I will turn out of the road for you"

What did they mean with that Iowa epitaph
"She averaged well for this vicinity"?
And why should the old Des Moines editor
say they could write on his gravestone.
"He et what was sot before him"?

"I never borrowed your umbrella," said a
borrower, "and if I did I brought it back"
He was quiet as a wooden-legged man on a tin
roof and busy as a one-armed paper-hanger
with the hives
When a couple of fried eggs were offered the
new hired man he said, "I don't dirty my
plate for less than six "

Why did the top sergeant tell the rookie, "Put
on your hat, here comes a woodpecker"?
"Whiskey," taunted the Irish orator, "whiskey
it is that makes you shoot at the landlords
—and miss 'em!"

"Unless you learn," said the father to the son,
"how to tell a horse chestnut from a chest-
nut horse you may have to live on soup made
from the shadow of a starved pigeon "
Said Oscar neither laughing nor crying "We fed
the rats to the cats and the cats to the rats
and was just getting into the big money when
the whole thing went blooey on account of the
overproduction of rats and cats "

Where you been so long?
What good wind blew you in?
Snow again, kid, I didn't get your drift
Everything now is either swell or lousy
"It won't be long now," was answered,
"The worst is yet to come "
Of the dead merchant prince whose holdings
were colossal the ditch-digger queried,
"How much did he leave? All of it "

"What do you want to be?"
 T R asked
 Bruere answered, "Just an
 earthworm turning over a
 little of the soil near me"
 "Great men never feel great,"
 say the Chinese
 "Small men never feel small"

3 3

REMEMBER the chameleon He was a well-behaved chameleon and nothing could be brought against his record As a chameleon he had done the things that should have been done and left undone the things that should have been left undone He was a first-class unimpeachable chameleon and nobody had anything on him But he came to a Scotch plaid and tried to cross it In order to cross he had to imitate six different yarn colors, first one and then another and back to the first or second He was a brave chameleon and died at the crossroads true to his chameleon instincts

What kind of a liar are you?
 People lie because they don't remember clear what they saw
 People lie because they can't help making a story better than it was the way it happened
 People tell "white lies" so as to be decent to others
 People lie in a pinch, hating to do it, but lying on because it might be worse
 And people lie just to be liars for a crooked personal gain
 What sort of a liar are you?
 Which of these liars are you?

3 4

IF you can imagine love letters written back and forth between Mary Magdalene and Judas Iscariot, if you can see Napoleon dying and saying he was only a sawdust emperor and an imitation of the real thing, if you can see judges step down from the bench and take death sentences from murderers sitting in black robes, if you can see big thieves protected by law acknowledging to petty thieves handcuffed and convicted that they are both enemies of society, if you can vision

an opposite for every reality, then you can shake hands with yourself and murmur, "Pardon my glove, what were we saying when interrupted?"

35

THE sea moves always, the wind moves always
 They want and want and there is no end to their wanting.
 What they sing is the song of the people
 Man will never arrive, man will be always on the way
 It is written he shall rest but never for long
 The sea and the wind tell him he shall be lonely, meet love, be shaken
 with struggle, and go on wanting

"When I was born in the Chicago Lying-in Hospital," said the pioneer's grandson, "there was a surgeon with multiple instruments, two nurses in starched uniforms with silk, gauze, antiseptics, and the obliterating cone of the grateful anesthesia. When my grandfather was born in the naked cornlands of Nebraska there was only a granny woman with a few clean rags and a pail of warm water."

You can go now yes go now Go east or west, go north or south, you can go now Or you can go up or go down now And after these there is no place to go If you say no to all of them then you stay here You don't go You are fixed and put And from here if you choose you send up rockets, you let down buckets Here then for you is the center of things

36

"I AM zero, naught, one cipher,"
 meditated the symbol preceding the numbers.
 "Think of nothing I am the sign of it
 I am bitter weather, zero
 In heavy fog the sky ceiling is zero
 Think of nowhere to go I am it
 Those doomed to nothing for today
 and the same nothing for tomorrow,
 those without hits, runs, errors,
 I am their sign and epitaph,
 the goose egg 0
 even the least of these—that is me"

When they told those who had no money
"Save your money"
Those who had no money flashed back
"Would you ask those with nothing to eat
to eat less?"

"The stairway of time ever echoes
with the wooden shoe going up
the polished boot coming down "

Ghost and rich man
"What do you see out of the window?"
"The people "
"And what do you see in the mirror?"
"Myself "
"Yet the glass in the mirror is the
same only it is silvered "

"If I am a queen and you are a queen,
who fetches the water?" inquire the
Hindus, the Turks asking "If you are
a gentleman and I am a gentleman, who
will milk the cow?" and the Irish
"If you're a lady and I'm a lady,
who'll put the sow out of the house?"

"The man put green spectacles on his cow and fed her sawdust
Maybe she would believe it was grass
But she didn't She died on him "

When the horses gagged at going farther up the steep hill, the driver
shouted

"First class passengers, keep your seats
Second class passengers, get out and walk
Third class passengers, get out and shove "

Said the scorpion of hate "The poor hate the rich The rich hate the
poor The south hates the north The west hates the east. The
workers hate their bosses The bosses hate their workers The coun-
try hates the towns The towns hate the country We are a house

divided against itself We are millions of hands raised against each other We are united in but one aim—getting the dollar And when we get the dollar we employ it to get more dollars ”

37

“So you want to divide all the money there is and give every man his share?”

“That’s it Put it all in one big pile and split it even for everybody ”

“And the land, the gold, silver, oil, copper, you want that divided up?”

“Sure—an even whack for all of us ”

“Do you mean that to go for horses and cows?”

“Sure—why not?”

“And how about pigs?”

“Oh to hell with you—you know I got a couple of pigs ”

In the night and the mist these voices
What is mine is mine and I am going to keep it
What is yours is yours and you are welcome to keep it
You will have to fight me to take from me what is mine
Part of what is mine is yours and you are welcome to it
What is yours is mine and I am going to take it from you

In the night and the mist

the voices meet

as the clash of steel on steel

Over the rights of possession and control and the points
what is mine? what is yours?
and who says so?

The poor were divided into
the deserving and the undeserving
and a pioneer San Franciscan lacked words
“It’s hard enough to be poor
but to be poor and undeserving ”
He saw the slumborn illborn wearyborn
from fathers and mothers the same
out of rooms dank with rot

and scabs, rags, festerings, tubercles, chancres,
the very doorways quavering,
"What's the use?"

"I came to a country,"
said a wind-bitten vagabond,
"where I saw shoemakers barefoot
saying they had made too many shoes
I met carpenters living outdoors
saying they had built too many houses
Clothing workers I talked with,
bushelmen and armhole-basters,
said their coats were on a ragged edge
because they had made too many coats
And I talked with farmers, yeomanry,
the backbone of the country,
so they were told,
saying they were in debt and near starvation
because they had gone ahead like always
and raised too much wheat and corn
too many hogs, sheep, cattle
When I said, 'You live in a strange country,'
they answered slow, like men
who wouldn't waste anything, not even language
'You ain't far wrong there, young feller
We're going to do something, we don't know what'"

The drowning man in the river
answered the man on the bridge
"I don't want to die,
I'll lose my job in the molding room of
the Malleable Iron and Castings Works"
And the living man on the bridge
hotfooted to the molding room foreman
of the Malleable Iron and Castings Works
and got a short answer
"You're ten minutes late The man who
pushed that fellow off the bridge
is already on the job"

"What do you want?" a passing stranger asked
a County Kerry farmer

"What is it I'm wantin'? Me byes and gurruls
is gone The rain has rotted the prathies
The landlord has taken me pig for the rent
All I'm wantin' is the Judgment Day"

"The poor of the earth hide themselves together," wrote Job meaning in
those days too they had a shantytown

"As wild asses in the wilderness they must go forth, to seek food as their
task," wrote Job meaning then too they carried the banner and
hoped to connect with board and clothes somehow

"In a field not theirs they harvest," wrote Job as though in Judea then
the frontier was gone, as now in America instead of free homesteads
the signs say No Trespassing

"The weaklings groan and the souls of the wounded cry for help," wrote
Job taking special notice of those "forced to garner the vineyard of
the wicked one," mentioning footless wanderers of Bible times as
though the devices of men then too had an edge against the prop-
ertyless

In the Sunflower State 1928 Anno Domini
a Jayhawker sunburnt and gaunt
drove to a loading platform
and took what he got for his hogs
and spoke before two other hog raisers.

"Everything's lopsided

"I raise hogs and the railroads and the banks take them away from me
and I get hit in the hind end

"The more hogs I raise the worse my mortgages look

"I try to sleep and I hear those mortgages gnawing in the night like rats
in a corn crib

"I want to shoot somebody but I don't know who

"We'll do something You wait and see

"We don't have to stand for this skin game if we're free Americans"

"Get off this estate"

"What for?"

"Because it's mine"

"Where did you get it?"

"From my father"
"Where did he get it?"
"From his father"
"And where did he get it?"
"He fought for it"
"Well, I'll fight you for it"

38

HAVE you seen men handed refusals
till they began to laugh
at the notion of ever landing a job again—
Muttering with the laugh,
"It's driving me nuts and the family too,"
Mumbling of hoodoos and jinx,
fear of defeat creeping in their vitals—
Have you never seen this?
or do you kid yourself
with the fond soothing syrup of four words
"Some folks won't work"??
Of course some folks won't work—
they are sick or wornout or lazy
or misled with the big idea
the idle poor should imitate the idle rich

Have you seen women and kids
step out and hustle for the family
some in night life on the streets
some fighting other women and kids
for the leavings of fruit and vegetable markets
or searching alleys and garbage dumps for scraps?

Have you seen them with savings gone
furniture and keepsakes pawned
and the pawntickets blown away in cold winds?
by one letdown and another ending
in what you might call slums—
To be named perhaps in case reports
and tabulated and classified
among those who have crossed over
from the employables into the unemployables?

What is the saga of the employables?
what are the breaks they get?
What are the dramas of personal fate
spilled over from industrial transitions?
what punishments handed bottom people
who have wronged no man's house
or things or person?

Stocks are property, yes
Bonds are property, yes
Machines, land, buildings, are property, yes.
A job is property,
no, nix, nah nah

The rights of property are guarded
by ten thousand laws and fortresses
The right of a man to live by his work—
what is this right?
and why does it clamor?
and who can hush it
so it will stay hushed?
and why does it speak
and though put down speak again
with strengths out of the earth?

39

THERE have been thousands of Andy Adams
only Andy was one of the few who had the words
"Our men were plainsmen and were at home
as long as they could see the North Star"
They got his drift when he laughed
"Blankets? Never use them Sleep on your belly and
cover it with your back and get up with the
birds in the morning
"Saddles? Every good cowman takes his saddle
wherever he goes though he may not have
clothes enough to dust a fiddle"
They could ride long hours in rain and sleet dozing
and taking short sleeps in their saddles, resting
to linger over their morning coffee

This breed of men gone to a last roundup?
They will be heard from
They tell us now any Texas girl is worth marrying
"No matter what happens, she has seen worse"

In oak and walnut
Those old New England carpenters hoisted and
wrought
Sunup till sundown they hoisted and wrought in
oak and walnut
Wood had a meaning and wood spoke to the feel of
the fingers
The hammer handles and the handwrought nails
somehow had blessings

And they are gone now? their blood is no longer
alive and speaking?
They no longer come through telling of the hands
of man having craft?
Let their beds and staircases, chairs and gables now
lingering testify:
The strong workman whose blood goes into his
work no more dies than the people die

"I'm holding my own,"
said more than one pioneer.
"I didn't have anything
when I landed here
and I ain't got anything now
but I got some hope left
I ain't lost hope yet
I'm a wanter and a hoper"

40

"We live only once"
Of course the people buy great big hump-backed
double-jointed fresh-roasted peanuts at ten
a sack folks ten a sack—
Of course the people go to see the greatest

aggregation of concatenated curiosities and
monstrosities ever assembled beneath one
canvas—

Of course they enjoy the oily slant-eyed spieler
with his slick bazoo selling tickets and gab-
bing One at a time please One at a time,
and inside the tent Tom Thumb and Jumbo,
the hippodrome charnoteers, the clowns and
tumbler, the lighted pink moment when a
lithe woman is flung into empty air from
one flying trapeze to another
“We live only once”

Of course the greatest showman on earth who
excused himself with saying, “The people
love to be humbugged,” was himself hum-
bugged and lost the first of his fortunes to
the fate that humbugged him out of it.

Do this, buy now, go here,
stand up, come down, watch
me and you will see I have
nothing up my sleeve and I
merely execute a twist of
the wrist and a slight mo-
tion of the hand Do this,
buy now, go here, plans,
programs, inventions, promises,
games, commands, suggestions,
hints, insinuations, pour
from professional schemers
into the ears of the people

41

“WHY did the children
put beans in their ears
when the one thing we told the children
they must not do
was put beans in their ears?”

"Why did the children
pour molasses on the cat
when the one thing we told the children
they must not do
was pour molasses on the cat?"

42

Why repeat? I heard you the first time
You can lead a horse to water, if you've
got the horse
The rooster and the horse agreed not to
step on each other's feet
The caterpillar is a worm in a raccoon
coat going for a college education
The cockroach is always wrong when it
argues with the chicken
If I hadn't done it Monday somebody
else would have done it Tuesday
Money is like manure—good only when
spread around
You're such a first-class liar I'll take a
chance with you
A short horse is soon curried
A still pig drinks the swill
Small potatoes and few in a hill
A fat man on a bony horse "I feed my-
self—others feed the horse"
No peace on earth with the women, no
life anywhere without them
Some men dress quick, others take as
much time as a woman
"You're a liar" "Surely not if you say
so"
He tried to walk on both sides of the
street at once
He tried to tear the middle of the street
in two
"When is a man intoxicated?" "When he
tries to kiss the bartender good night"

"He says he'll kick me the next time we
meet What'll I do?" "Sit down"
He's as handy as that bird they call the
elephant
Now that's settled and out of the way
what are you going to do next?
"From here on," said the driver at an
imaginary line near the foothills of
the Ozarks, "the hills don't get any
higher but the hollers get deeper
and deeper"
So slick he was his feet slipped out from
under him
The ground flew up and hit him in the
face
Trade it for a dog, drown the dog, and
you'll be rid of both of them
There'll be many a dry eye at his funeral.
"Which way to the post office, boy?"
"I don't know" "You don't know
much, do you?" "No, but I ain't
lost"

43

WHEN we say fresh eggs we mean fresh
Buying or selling strictly fresh eggs we mean
strictly
If eggs are guaranteed extra special what more
could be asked?
A rotten egg can't be spoiled and a shrewd
buyer knows an asking price from a sell-
ing price
Why do they say of some fellows, "He knows
all about the Constitution and the price
of eggs"?
Eggs offered as plain and ordinary means as
eggs they are not bad
The egg market punster noted of one buyer,
"He dozen't eggsspect eggs speckled"

Eggs spotted or dirty of course are priced
 accordingly
 Broken eggs can never be mended they go
 in a barrel by themselves
 What sort of an egg are you ??
 Just today or yesterday someone was saying
 you are a good egg or a bad egg or not-
 so-bad or hard to classify
 Under a microscope Agassiz studied one egg
 chaos, flux, constellations, rainbows
 "It is a universe in miniature"

44

WHY should any man try to find the distance to the moon by guessing
 half way and then multiplying by two?
 To never see a fool you lock yourself in your room and smash the looking-
 glass
 The new two dollar a day street-sprinkler driver took his job so serious he
 went right on driving while the rain poured down
 "What! you saw a man drowning and didn't help him?" "Well, he didn't
 ask me to"
 "Help! help! I'm drowning" "Tuesday is the day I help the drowning
 and I'll be here Tuesday"
 "The peacock has a beautiful tail," said the other birds "But look at
 those legs! and what a voice!"
 The farther up the street you go the tougher they get and I live in the
 last house
 There's only two in the country and I'm both of 'em
 I can live without you in the daytime but oh when that evening sun goes
 down it's nighttime that's killing me
 When the hotel waitress saw the traveling man eat fourteen ears of corn-
 on-the-cob one summer noon in the horse-and-buggy days, she asked,
 "Don't you think it would be cheaper for you to board at a livery-
 stable?"
 The fresh young hotel clerk pulled a fast one on the internationally famous
 scientist who asked if they had an Encyclopaedia Britannica in the
 house "No, we haven't, but what is it you'd like to know?"
 The degree B B D P B B B means Big Bass Drum Player Boston Brass
 Band

The letter of recommendation read, "This man worked for me one week and I am satisfied"

If he had a little more sense he'd be a half-wit

He opened his mouth and put his foot in it

"Do you think it will rain?" "Be a long dry spell if it don't"

"Got enough, sonny?" "No, but I've got down to where it don't taste good any more"

Yesterday's hits win no runs today

Nothing is so dead as yesterday's newspaper

Do right by any man and don't write any woman

The best throw of the dice is to throw 'em away

"Give me something to eat," grinned a hobo "I'm so thirsty I don't know where I'm going to sleep tonight"

"When he whittles toward him he's in good humor, but let him alone when he cuts the other way," they said of a Union Stockyards pioneer

"And now," said the justice of the peace, "by the authority of the State of Wisconsin in me vested I do hereby pronounce you man and woman"

"Don't analyze me—please," the stenographer pleaded "Sometimes when I think about you I'm afraid my heart will strip a gear"

45

THEY have yarns

Of a skyscraper so tall they had to put hinges

On the two top stories so to let the moon go by,

Of one corn crop in Missouri when the roots

Went so deep and drew off so much water

The Mississippi riverbed that year was dry,

Of pancakes so thin they had only one side,

Of "a fog so thick we shingled the barn and six feet out on the fog,"

Of Pecos Pete straddling a cyclone in Texas and riding it to the west coast where "it rained out under him,"

Of the man who drove a swarm of bees across the Rocky Mountains and the Desert "and didn't lose a bee,"

Of a mountain railroad curve where the engineer in his cab can touch the caboose and spit in the conductor's eye,

Of the boy who climbed a cornstalk growing so fast he would have starved to death if they hadn't shot biscuits up to him,

Of the old man's whiskers "When the wind was with him his whiskers
arrived a day before he did,"
Of the hen laying a square egg and cackling, "Ouch!" and of hens laying
eggs with the dates printed on them,
Of the ship captain's shadow it froze to the deck one cold winter night,
Of mutineers on that same ship put to chipping rust with rubber
hammers,
Of the sheep counter who was fast and accurate "I just count their feet
and divide by four,"
Of the man so tall he must climb a ladder to shave himself,
Of the runt so teeny-weeny it takes two men and a boy to see him,
Of mosquitoes one can kill a dog, two of them a man,
Of a cyclone that sucked cookstoves out of the kitchen, up the chimney
flue, and on to the next town,
Of the same cyclone picking up wagon-tracks in Nebraska and dropping
them over in the Dakotas,
Of the hook-and-eye snake unlocking itself into forty pieces, each piece
two inches long, then in nine seconds flat snapping itself together
again,
Of the watch swallowed by the cow—when they butchered her a year
later the watch was running and had the correct time,
Of horned snakes, hoop snakes that roll themselves where they want to
go, and rattlesnakes carrying bells instead of rattles on their tails,
Of the herd of cattle in California getting lost in a giant redwood tree
that had hollowed out,
Of the man who killed a snake by putting its tail in its mouth so it
swallowed itself,
Of railroad trains whizzing along so fast they reach the station before
the whistle,
Of pigs so thin the farmer had to tie knots in their tails to keep them
from crawling through the cracks in their pens,
Of Paul Bunyan's big blue ox, Babe, measuring between the eyes forty-
two ax-handles and a plug of Star tobacco exactly,
Of John Henry's hammer and the curve of its swing and his singing of
it as "a rainbow round my shoulder"

"Do tell!"

"I want to know!"

"You don't say so!"

"For the land's sake!"

"Gosh all fish-hooks!"
"Tell me some more
I don't believe a word you say
but I love to listen
to your sweet harmonica
to your chin-music
Your fish stories hang together
when they're just a pack of lies
you ought to have a leather medal
you ought to have a statue
carved of butter you deserve
a large bouquet of turnips"

"Yessir," the traveler drawled,
"Away out there in the petrified forest
everything goes on the same as usual
The petrified birds sit in their petrified nests
and hatch their petrified young from petrified eggs"

A high pressure salesman jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge and was saved
by a policeman But it didn't take him long to sell the idea to the
policeman So together they jumped off the bridge

One of the oil men in heaven started a rumor of a gusher down in hell
All the other oil men left in a hurry for hell As he gets to thinking
about the rumor he had started he says to himself there might be
something in it after all So he leaves for hell in a hurry

"The number 42 will win this raffle, that's my number" And when he
won they asked him whether he guessed the number or had a
system He said he had a system, "I took up the old family album
and there on page 7 was my grandfather and grandmother both on
page 7 I said to myself this is easy for 7 times 7 is the number that
will win and 7 times 7 is 42"

Once a shipwrecked sailor caught hold of a stateroom door and floated
for hours till friendly hands from out of the darkness threw him a
rope And he called across the night, "What country is this?" and
hearing voices answer, "New Jersey," he took a fresh hold on the
floating stateroom door and called back half-wearily, "I guess I'll float
a little farther"

An Ohio man bundled up the tin roof of a summer kitchen and sent it to a motorcar maker with a complaint of his car not giving service In three weeks a new car arrived for him and a letter "We regret delay in shipment but your car was received in a very bad order"

A Dakota cousin of this Ohio man sent six years of tin can accumulations to the same works, asking them to overhaul his car Two weeks later came a rebuilt car, five old tin cans, and a letter "We are also forwarding you five parts not necessary in our new model"

Thus fantasies heard at filling stations in the midwest Another relates to a Missouri mule who took aim with his heels at an automobile rattling by The car turned a somersault, lit next a fence, ran right along through a cornfield till it came to a gate, moved onto the road and went on its way as though nothing had happened The mule heehawed with desolation, "What's the use?"

Another tells of a farmer and his family stalled on a railroad crossing, how they jumped out in time to see a limited express knock it into flinders, the farmer calling, "Well, I always did say that car was no shucks in a real pinch"

When the Masonic Temple in Chicago was the tallest building in the United States west of New York, two men who would cheat the eyes out of you if you gave 'em a chance, took an Iowa farmer to the top of the building and asked him, "How is this for high?" They told him that for \$25 they would go down in the basement and turn the building around on its turn-table for him while he stood on the roof and saw how this seventh wonder of the world worked He handed them \$25 They went He waited They never came back

This is told in Chicago as a folk tale, the same as the legend of Mrs O'Leary's cow kicking over the barn lamp that started the Chicago fire, when the Georgia visitor, Robert Toombs, telegraphed an Atlanta crony, "Chicago is on fire, the whole city burning down, God be praised!"

Nor is the prize sleeper Rip Van Winkle and his scolding wife forgotten, nor the headless horseman scooting through Sleepy Hollow Nor the sunken treasure-ships in coves and harbors, the hideouts of gold and silver sought by Coronado, nor the Flying Dutchman rounding the Cape doomed to nevermore pound his ear nor ever again take a snooze for himself

Nor the sailor's caretaker Mother Carey seeing to it that every seafaring

man in the afterworld has a seabird to bring him news of ships and women, an albatross for the admiral, a gull for the deckhand
 Nor the sailor with a sweetheart in every port of the world, nor the ships that set out with flying colors and all the promises you could ask, the ships never heard of again,
 Nor Jim Liverpool, the riverman who could jump across any river and back without touching land he was that quick on his feet,
 Nor Mike Fink along the Ohio and the Mississippi, half wild horse and half cock-eyed alligator, the rest of him snags and snapping turtle
 "I can out-run, out-jump, out-shoot, out-brag, out-drink, and out-fight, rough and tumble, no holts barred, any man on both sides of the river from Pittsburgh to New Orleans and back again to St Louis My trigger finger itches and I want to go redhot War, famine and bloodshed puts flesh on my bones, and hardship's my daily bread"
 Nor the man so lean he threw no shadow six rattlesnakes struck at him at one time and every one missed him

46

THE gang in its working clothes
 the picnic bunch in its best bib and tucker
 hicks from the sticks and big town hicks
 they sing whatever they want to
 and it may be The Old Rugged Cross
 or The Old Gray Mare or a late hit
 They are hit by the hit songs
 It's a hit only when it hits them
 They soon drop it like a hot potato
 or they hold on to it for keeps
 And whenever they keep changing a song
 with tunes twisted forty ways
 and new verses you never heard of—
 at last then it's a folk song

"Everybody is cleverer than anybody,"
 said a smooth old fox
 who once ran France with his left hand

Of the woman born deaf, blind and dumb, the vaudeville audience asked questions

"Have you ever thought of getting married? Why has a cow two stomachs? How much is too many? Do you believe in ghosts? Do you think it is a blessing to be poor? Do you dream? Do you think business is looking up? Am I going on a trip?"

And the woman enjoyed answering these questions from people born with sight and hearing

"I liked it I liked to feel the warm tide of human life pulsing round and round me"

Her face lighted when a burst of handclapping and light laughter swept the audience

"How do you know when we applaud you?" they asked

And she answered the vibrations in the boards of the stage floor under her feet told her of every shading of applause

In the farm house passing another crock of apples,

On the streetcar riding to the roller coasters,

At picnics, clambakes, or the factory workbench

They have riddles, good and bad conundrums

Which goes through the plank first, the bullet or the hole?

Where does the music go when the fiddle is put in the box?

Where does your lap go when you stand up? The same place your fist goes when you open your hand

What are the two smallest things mentioned in the Bible? The widow's mite and the wicked flee

Who are the shortest people mentioned in the Bible? Bildad the Shuhite, Knee-high-miah, and the man who had nothing but from whom even that which he had was taken away

What was the last thing Paul Revere said to his horse on the famous ride? "Whoa!"

"Did you hear about the empty barrel of flour?" "No" "Nothing in it"

What is there more of in the world than anything else? Ends

They have Irish bulls timeworn and mossgrown

You are to be hanged and I hope it will prove a warning to you

I took so much medicine I was sick a long time after I got well

I can never get these boots on till I have worn them for a while

One of us must kill the other—let it be me We were boys together—at
least I was
If all the world were blind what a melancholy sight it would be
This will last forever and afterward be sold for old iron
They would cut us into mince-meat and throw our bleeding heads on the
table to stare us in the face
On the dim and faroff shore of the future we can see the footprint of an
unseen hand
We pursue the shadow, the bubble bursts, and leaves in our hands only
ashes

“Ah there tootsie wootsie,” has its day
till the good old summertime has gone
with the kit and caboodle of its day
into the second-hand bins, the rummage sales,
and another whim emerges in, “Okay toots!”

The people, yes, the customers,
In short-order lunch rooms they read signs
If the ice-box gets on fire ring the towel
Don't tip the waiters—it upsets them
Eat here—why go somewhere else to be cheated?
Your face is good but it won't go in the cash register
“There ain't no strong coffee, there's only weak people,” said one heavy
on the java

The people is a child at school writing howlers,
writing answers half wrong and half right
The government of England is a limited mockery
Gravitation is that which if there were none we would all fly away
There were no Christians among the early Gauls, they were mostly
lawyers

47

WHO made Paul Bunyan, who gave him birth as a myth, who joked him
into life as the Master Lumberjack, who fashioned him forth as an
apparition easing the hours of men amid axes and trees, saws and
lumber? The people, the bookless people, they made Paul and had
him alive long before he got into the books for those who read He
grew up in shanties, around the hot stoves of winter, among socks

and mittens drying, in the smell of tobacco smoke and the roar of laughter mocking the outside weather And some of Paul came overseas in wooden bunks below decks in sailing vessels And some of Paul is old as the hills, young as the alphabet.

The Pacific Ocean froze over in the winter of the Blue Snow and Paul Bunyan had long teams of oxen hauling regular white snow over from China This was the winter Paul gave a party to the Seven Axmen Paul fixed a granite floor sunk two hundred feet deep for them to dance on Still, it tipped and tilted as the dance went on And because the Seven Axmen refused to take off their hob-nailed boots, the sparks from the nails of their dancing feet lit up the place so that Paul didn't light the kerosene lamps No women being on the Big Onion river at that time the Seven Axmen had to dance with each other, the one left over in each set taking Paul as a partner The commotion of the dancing that night brought on an earthquake and the Big Onion river moved over three counties to the east

One year when it rained from St Patrick's Day till the Fourth of July, Paul Bunyan got disgusted because his celebration on the Fourth was spoiled He dived into Lake Superior and swam to where a solid pillar of water was coming down He dived under this pillar, swam up into it and climbed with powerful swimming strokes, was gone about an hour, came splashing down, and as the rain stopped, he explained, "I turned the dam thing off" This is told in the Big North Woods and on the Great Lakes, with many particulars

Two mosquitoes lighted on one of Paul Bunyan's oxen, killed it, ate it, cleaned the bones, and sat on a grub shanty picking their teeth as Paul came along Paul sent to Australia for two special bumblebees to kill these mosquitoes But the bees and the mosquitoes intermarried, their children had stingers on both ends And things kept getting worse till Paul brought a big boatload of sorghum up from Louisiana and while all the bee-mosquitoes were eating at the sweet sorghum he floated them down to the Gulf of Mexico They got so fat that it was easy to drown them all between New Orleans and Galveston

Paul logged on the Little Gimlet in Oregon one winter The cook stove at that camp covered an acre of ground They fastened the side of

a hog on each snowshoe and four men used to skate on the griddle while the cook flipped the pancakes. The eating table was three miles long, elevators carried the cakes to the ends of the table where boys on bicycles rode back and forth on a path down the center of the table dropping the cakes where called for.

Benny, the Little Blue Ox of Paul Bunyan, grew two feet every time Paul looked at him, when a youngster. The bairn was gone one morning and they found it on Benny's back, he grew out of it in a night. One night he kept pawing and bellowing for more pancakes, till there were two hundred men at the cook shanty stove trying to keep him fed. About breakfast time Benny broke loose, tore down the cook shanty, ate all the pancakes piled up for the loggers' breakfast. And after that Benny made his mistake, he ate the red hot stove, and that finished him. This is only one of the hot stove stories told in the North Woods.

48

ONE of the Cherokees in Oklahoma, having a million or so from oil rights, went to a motorcar dealer, looked over the different new makes, and in a corner of the salesroom noticed a brand-new white hearse, embellished, shining, emblazoned "This one for me," he said, and he rode away, his chauffeur driving and himself seated inside the glittering white funeral car. They tell this in Oklahoma as a folk tale. It is

In Honolulu they have cockroach races and bet on the winner.
In Japan they have grasshopper stables, each grasshopper in a little stall by himself.
In Mexico they sit around a table each man having a cube of sugar and the first to have a fly sit on his sugar wins the money.

Didn't he belong to the people, that Gallic eater and drinker whose will was short and read "I have nothing, I owe much, I leave the remainder to the poor"?

And why shouldn't they say of one windbag in Washington, D. C., "An empty taxicab drew up to the curb and Senator So-and-So stepped out"?

"The hungry hog follows his nose to the warm
swill," said an old farmer
"He could live on the smell of an oil rag," they
said of an old sailor on a tramp steamer
"When the wind favors you can smell a slave-ship
seven miles," they said in days now gone

"Baby, baby, you will get new shoes at the gate of
heaven," sing the Mexican mothers to the mu-
chacho

"How are crops this year?"
"Not so good for a good year
but not so bad for a bad year "

"Didn't you hear me holler for help?"
"Yes but you're such a liar
I didn't think you meant it "

What about that railroad engineer
running on the Pennsy
twenty-two years out of Chicago
leaving his mother \$12,000
directing in his will
they should burn his body
as a piece of rolling-stock
beyond rehabilitation or repair
and take the ashes to his pet locomotive
and when they had run her
to the Beverly curve at 87th Street
where the open prairie view was special
and his eyes had so often
met a changing sky of red and gold—
there from the old cab of locomotive No 8152
they could empty his firebox
they could throw his ashes
strew the last cinders and clinkers
of an engineer, an old hogger

thankful he had lived—
Always when he had rounded that curve

his run was over and he could go home—
 What did he have?
 They obliged him Why shouldn't they?
 They were glad to "But he was peculiar, wasn't he?"

"Haven't you had a little too much?" the White House guard asked the Sioux warrior who shifted a blanket "A little too much is just enough"

When Chicago has a debate whether there is a hell someone always says,
 "Down in hell they debate whether there is a Chicago"

"Too bad you have to work in this kind of a soup parlor," the customer sympathized, the waiter refusing the sympathy "I work here but I don't eat here"

A short-order lunch room in Waterloo hangs up a sign for visiting Hawkeyes "We eat our own hash—think it over"

A college boarding house in Ann Arbor instructs the scissorbill "God hates a glutton—learn to say No"

The slim little wiry Texas Ranger answering a riot call heard from the town committee that they certainly expected at least a company of troopers, which brought his query, "There's only one riot—isn't there?"

"Are you happy?" the evangelist asked the new half-convert "Well, parson, I'm not damn happy, just *happy*, that's all"

49

He was a king or a shah, an ahkoond or rajah,
 the head man of the country,
 and he commanded the learned men of the books
 they must put all their books in one,
 which they did,
 and this one book into a single page,
 which they did

"Suppose next," said the head man, who was
 either a king or shah, an ahkoond or rajah,
 "Suppose now you give my people
 the history of the world and its peoples
 in three words—come, go to work!"

And the learned men sat long into the night
 and confabulated over their ponderings

and brought back three words

“Born,
troubled,
died ”

This was their history of Everyman

“Give me next for my people,” spoke the head man,
“in one word the inside kernel of all you know,
the knowledge of your ten thousand books
with a forecast of what will happen next—
this for my people in one word ”

And again they sat into the peep of dawn
and the arguments raged
and the glass prisms of the chandeliers shook
and at last they came to a unanimous verdict
and brought the head man one word
“Maybe ”

And in that country and in other countries
over mountain ranges where white clouds rested
and beyond the blue sea and its endless tumblers
the people by sunlight, by candlelight, by lanterns
by the new white bulbs spoken to with buttons,
the people had sayings touching the phrase

“Born, troubled, died,”
carrying farther the one word “maybe,”
spacing values between serenity and anguish,
from daily humdrum and the kitchen stove
to the inevitable rainbow or evening star,
sayings

What should I say when it is better to say nothing?

What is said is said and no sponge can wipe it out.

Ask the young people—they know everything

They say—what say they? Let them say.

Have you noticed painted flowers give no smell?

A woman and a melon are not to be known by their outsides

The handsomest woman can give only what she has

The miser and the pig are no use till dead

An old man in love is a flower in winter

Bean by bean we fill the sack

Step by step one goes far

No matter how important you are, you may get the measles
Wash a dog, comb a dog, still a dog
Fresh milk is not to be had from a statue
Apes may put on finery but they are still apes
Every man must eat his peck of dirt before he dies
God knows well who are the best pilgrims
The ache for glory sends free people into slavery
He who is made of honey will be eaten to death by flies
No matter how cheap you make shoes geese will go barefoot
He drives the wind from his house with his hat

Wedlock is a padlock
Take a good look at the mother before
getting tied up with the daughter
Let a mother be ever so bad she wishes
her daughter to be good
The man hardly ever marries the woman
he jokes about she often marries the
man she laughs at
Keep your eyes open before marriage,
half-shut afterward

In heaven an angel is nobody in particular
Even if your stomach be strong, eat as few
cockroaches as possible
The curse of the Spanish gypsy May you be
a mail carrier and have sore feet
Well lathered is half shaved
A wife is not a guitar you hang on the wall after playing it.
The liar forgets
A redheaded man in the orchestra is a sure sign
of trouble
The shabby genteel would better be in rags
As sure as God made little apples he was busy
as a cranberry merchant
It will last about as long as a snowball in hell
I wouldn't take a million dollars for this baby and
I wouldn't give ten cents for another

Blue eyes say love me or I die
Black eyes say love me or I kill you

The sun rises and sets in her eyes
Wishes won't wash dishes
May all your children be acrobats
Leave something to wish for
Lips however rosy must be fed
Some kill with a feather
By night all cats are gray
Life goes before we know what it is
One fool is enough in a house
Even God gets tired of too much hallelujah
Take it easy and live long as brothers.
The baby's smile pays the bill

Yesterday is gone, tomorrow may never come,
today is here
The sins of omission are those we should have
committed and didn't
May you live to pick flowers off your enemies' graves
Some of them are so lazy they get up early in the morning
so as to have more time to lay around and do nothing
Some of them are dirty as a slut that's too lazy to lick herself
Let the guts be full for they carry the legs
The hypocrite talks like a saint and hides his cat claws
The half-wit was asked how he found the lost horse no others could
locate and explained, "I thought to myself where I would go if I
was a horse and I went there and he had"
He who has one foot in a brothel has another in a hospital
When the boy is growing he has a wolf in his belly
Handsome women generally fall into the hands of men not worth a
second look
When someone hits you with a rock hit him with a piece of cotton
Love your neighbor as yourself but don't take down your fence
A fence should be horse-high, pig-tight, bull-strong
Except in fairy stories the bashful get less
A beggar's hand has no bottom
Polite words open iron gates
Be polite but not too polite

50

FROM what graveyards and sepulchers have they come,
these given the public eye and ear
who chatter idly of their personal success
as though they flowered by themselves alone
saying "I," "I," "I,"
crediting themselves with advances and gains,
"I did this, I did that,"
and hither and thither, "It was me, Me,"
the people, yes, the people, being omitted
or being mentioned as incidental
or failing completely of honorable mention,
as though what each did was by him alone
and there is a realm of personal achievement
wherein he was the boss, the big boy,
and it wasn't luck nor the breaks
nor a convenient public
but it was him, "I," "Me,"
and the idea and the inference is
the pay and the praise should be his—
from what graveyards have they strolled
and do they realize their sepulchral manners
and what are the farther backgrounds?

Desecrate the landscape with your billboards, gentlemen,
Let no green valleys meet the beholder's eye without
Your announcements of gas, oil, beans, soup, whiskey, beer,
Your proclamations of shaving cream, tooth-paste, pills, tonics.
On the rocks and rugged hills, along clear streams and pastures
Set up your billboard brag and swagger, your raucous yells
Desecrate the landscape, gentlemen, go to it, hit 'em in the eye
Sell 'em Make 'em eat it Sell 'em the name, the idea, the habit
If a rock stands proud and grand anywhere sling your signs up on it

The machine yes the machine
never wastes anybody's time
never watches the foreman
never talks back

never talks what is right or wrong
never listens to others talking or if
 it does listen it doesn't hear
never says we've been thinking, or, our
 feeling is like this
the machine yes the machine cuts your production cost
a man is a man and what can you do with him?
but a machine now you take a machine
no kids no woman never hungry never thirsty
all a machine needs is a little regular attention and plenty of grease

We raise more corn
to feed more hogs
to buy more land
to raise more corn
to feed more hogs
to

Once there was a frontier Year by year it moved west At last it moved
into the Pacific Ocean Word passed, "The frontier is gone, there is
no frontier any more" From then on no more frontiersmen, from
then on only jokers advising, "Go west, young man" This was long
after the old timers started west in covered wagons emblazoned "Ho
for California" "Oregon or Death" or "The Eleventh Command-
ment Mind Your Own Business" One with a sign reading "Pikes
Peak or Bust" came back with another "Busted by Gosh!" And you
can go now yes go now though the old frontiers are gone and the free
homesteads are few Now you can stay where you are and send up
rockets, let down buckets Now with less land you will have less
children

What happened in that buried city they
 found in Africa?
Once it had streets and people and business
 and politics
Once it saw the weddings of young men and
 women
And the children cried "mama" as the first
 word
And they had news from day to day of food,
 love, work, people

Now it is covered over with a level of snails,
hills of snails
The streets, houses, city hall, department of
public works,
Houses of money lenders, huts of the poor,
tabernacles,
Filled up and smoothed over by long proces-
sions of snails,
Legions of plodding thoughtless misbegotten
snails

"Isn't that an iceberg on the horizon, Captain?"

"Yes, Madam "

"What if we get in a collision with it?"

"The iceberg, Madam, will move right along
as though nothing had happened "

You can't come back to a home unless it was a
home you went away from
Between hay and grass neither one nor the other
Can't you be useful as well as ornamental?
Why don't you go roll a peanut around the corner?
When did they let you out?
The mules went to ask horns and came back without ears
When you get hold of a good thing freeze onto it
Nothing to do and all day to do it in
So dumb he spent his last dollar buying a pocketbook to put it in.
A little more sandpaper and this will be smooth
Write on one side of the paper and both sides of the subject
Swear to it on a stack of Bibles and they wouldn't believe you
Be not a baker if your head be of butter
Yesterday? It's a nickel thrown on a Salvation Army drum
How could I let go when it was all I could do to hold on?
Thousands drink themselves to death before one dies of thirst
He didn't have much till he marned a hunk of tin
There's always a nut on every family tree
The mosquitoes organized and drove me out of bed
We'll fight till hell freezes over and then write on the ice, "Come on
you bastards "
The yes-man spent his vacation yelling, "No! no! I tell you No!"

A man having nothing to feed his cow sang to her of the fresh green
grass to come this is the tune the old cow died on

The man feeding a hatful of doughnuts to a horse explained to the
curious, "I want to see how many he'll eat before he asks for a cup
of coffee"

"I fired the man," said the new section boss, "not because I had any-
thing agin him but because I had the authority"

"Don't I argue? Don't I sputify?" the backwoods preacher inquired of
the complaining committee whose chairman responded, "Yes, you
do argue and you do sputify but you don't tell wherein"

The late riser is asked, "Are you up for all day?"

Shut the door—do you want to heat all outdoors?

He won't go to a wedding unless he's the bride nor a funeral unless he's
the corpse

"May you have the sevenyear itch," was answered, "I hope your wife eats
crackers in bed"

He was always a hell of a big fellow in Washington when he was in
Rhode Island and a hell of a big fellow in Rhode Island when he was
in Washington

You say you are going to Warsaw (or Boston) because you want me to
think you are going to Lemberg (or Buffalo) but I know you are going
to Warsaw (or Boston)

He got on a horse and rode off in all directions at once

Did they let you out or did you let yourself out?

"Why!" said a Republican Governor of Illinois, "Why the Democrats
can't run the government! It's all us Republicans can do"

This will last a thousand years and after that to the end of the world
When a member died the newspaper men of the Whitechapel Club of
Chicago gave the toast

"Hurrah for the next who goes!"

In Vermont a shut-mouthed husband finally broke forth to his wife,
"When I think of how much you have meant to me all these years,
it is almost more than I can do sometimes to keep from telling you so"

51

THE blood of all men of all nations being red
the Communist International named red its banner color
Pope Innocent IV gave cardinals their first red hats

saying a cardinal's blood belonged to the holy mother church
The bloodcolor red is a symbol

A Scotsman keeps the Sabbath and anything else he can lay his hands on,
say the English

A fighting Frenchman runs away from even a she-goat, say the Germans
A Russian, say the Poles, can be cheated only by a gypsy, a gypsy by a Jew,
a Jew by a Greek, and a Greek by the devil

"If I owned Texas and hell I would rent Texas and move to hell," said
a famous general

"That's right," wrote a Texas editor "Every man for his own country"
The Peloponnesians pulled these long ago, so did the Russians, the Chinese,
even the Fijis with rings in their noses Likewise.

An American is an Anglo-Saxon when an Englishman wants something
from him or

When a Frenchman has drunk too much he wants to dance, a German to
sing, a Spaniard to gamble, an Italian to brag, an Irishman to fight,
an American to make a speech or

"What is dumber than a dumb Irishman?" "A smart Swede"

These are in all tongues and regions of men Often they bring laughter and
sometimes blood

The propagandas of hate and war always monkey with the buzz-saw of race
and nationality, breed and kin, seldom saying, "When in doubt hold
your tongue"

In breathing spells of bloody combat between Christian nations the order
goes out "Don't let the men in the front-line trenches fraternize!"

The sea has fish for every man
Every blade of grass has its share of dew
The longest day must have its end
Man's life? A candle in the wind, hoar-frost
on stone
Nothing more certain than death and nothing
more uncertain than the hour
Men live like birds together in a wood, when
the time comes each takes his flight
As wave follows wave, so new men take old
men's places

The copperfaces, the red men, handed us tobacco,
the weed for the pipe of friendship,

also the bah-tah-to, the potato, the spud
Sunflowers came from Peruvians in ponchos
Early Italians taught us of chestnuts,
walnuts and peaches being Persian mementoes,
Siberians finding for us what rye might do,
Hindus coming through with the cucumber,
Egyptians giving us the onion, the pea,
Arabians handing advice with one gift
"Some like it, some say it's just spinach "

To the Chinese we have given
kerosene, bullets, bibles
and they have given us radishes, soy beans, silk,
poems, paintings, proverbs, porcelain, egg foo yong,
gunpowder, Fourth of July firecrackers, fireworks,
and labor gangs for the first Pacific railways

Now we may thank these people
or reserve our thanks
and speak of them as outsiders
and imply the request,
"Would you just as soon get off the earth?"
holding ourselves aloof in pride of distinction
saying to ourselves this costs us nothing
as though hate has no cost
as though hate ever grew anything worth growing
Yes we may say this trash is beneath our notice
or we may hold them in respect and affection
as fellow creepers on a commodious planet
saying, "Yes you too you too are people "

"When God finished making the world
He had a few stinking scraps of mud left over
and used it to make a yellow dog"

(and when they hate any race or nation
they name that race or nation
in place of the yellow dog)

They say and they say and the juice of prejudice drips from it
They say and they say and in the strut of fool pride spit in the wind
And the first of the seven rotting sins is this one pride
They set up a razzle-dazzle and get caught in their own revolving mirrors
"We are the greatest city, the greatest people Nothing like us ever was "

They set out for empire not knowing men and nations can die of empire
And the earth is strewn with the burst bladders of the puffed-up

The best preacher is the heart,
say the Jews of faith
The best teacher is time
The best book is the world
The best friend is God

The three worst waters,
say the Irish
brown rain at the fall of the leaf,
black rain at the springing of roots,
the gray rain of May

Love, a cough, an itch, or a fat paunch cannot be hid
Love, a cough, smoke, money or poverty, are hard to hide

Three things you can't nurse an old woman, a hen, and a sheep
Three who have their own way a mule, a pig, and a miser
Three to stay away from a snake, a man with an oily tongue, and a loose
woman
Three things dear to have fresh eggs, hickory smoked ham, and old
women's praise
Three things always pleasing a cat's kittens, a goat's kid, and a young
woman
The three prettiest dead a little child, a salmon, a black cock
Three of the coldest things a man's knee, a cow's horn, and a dog's nose
Three who come unbidden love, jealousy, fear
Three soon passing away the beauty of a woman, the rainbow, the echo
of the woods
Three worth wishing knowledge, grain, and friendship

Men are made of clay but women are made of men
An old friend is better than two new ones
He gets up early who pleases everybody
Two fools in a house are a couple too many
"I have forgotten your name" is better than "I don't
remember you"

Some can eat nails, others break their teeth on apple-
sauce

"Run home, your house is on fire" "No, that can't be
I locked the house when I left home"

"So now he's dead" "Yes" "What did he die of?"
"The want of breath"

There are two good men, say the Chinese, one dead,
the other not born yet

The seller can get along with one eye, the buyer
needs a hundred

The ragged colt may prove a good horse
The hasty bitch brings forth blind whelps

He's eaten off many a dish and never washed a dish
He's the sort that would haul rock with a race-horse
It would be like him to drown in a spoonful of water
If he had learned the hatter's trade, men would have
been born without heads

Ugly? Sleep stays away from him till he
covers his face

Poor? He can't raise money enough to buy
lumber for a backhouse

Big feet? Buying shoes he don't ask for a
number, he says, "Lemme see the biggest
you got"

"Slave, I have bought you"

"God knows you have"

"Now you belong to me"

"God knows I do"

"And you'll not run away?"

"God knows"

In the days of the faroff Pharaohs
in the days of Nebuchadnezzar
the king who ate grass
and reconsidered many former decisions—
one of the masters straddling a slave

"I think about you often
and I would be willing

to do many kind things
almost anything for you”
And the man under
“Almost anything except get off my back”

52

Who was that early sodbuster in Kansas? He leaned at the gatepost and studied the horizon and figured what corn might do next year and tried to calculate why God ever made the grasshopper and why two days of hot winds smother the life out of a stand of wheat and why there was such a spread between what he got for grain and the price quoted in Chicago and New York Drove up a newcomer in a covered wagon “What kind of folks live around here?” “Well, stranger, what kind of folks was there in the country you come from?” “Well, they was mostly a lowdown, lying, thieving, gossiping, backbiting lot of people” “Well, I guess, stranger, that’s about the kind of folks you’ll find around here” And the dusty gray stranger had just about blended into the dusty gray cottonwoods in a clump on the horizon when another newcomer drove up “What kind of folks live around here?” “Well, stranger, what kind of folks was there in the country you come from?” “Well, they was mostly a decent, hardworking, lawabiding, friendly lot of people” “Well, I guess, stranger, that’s about the kind of folks you’ll find around here” And the second wagon moved off and blended with the dusty gray cottonwoods on the horizon while the early sodbuster leaned at his gatepost and tried to figure why two days of hot winds smother the life out of a nice stand of wheat

In the dry farming country they said
“Here you look farther and see less,
and there are more creeks and less water,
and more cows and less milk,
and more horses and less grass,
than anywhere else in the world”

White man “I have no time to do anything”
Indian “Why you have all the time there
is, haven’t you?”

They said to the cows, “When you die we will
wrap you in fine linen sheets”

The cows "We shall be satisfied if we keep
our hides"

Of one piece of Pennsylvania a Quaker poet wrote
"God might have made a more beautiful region than Chester County—
but He never did"

An Oklahoma newspaper woman rewrote it "God might have made a
more beautiful country than Oklahoma—but He never did"

All flesh is grass From the sod the grazers derive their food and pass it
on to man Out of the grasslands man takes his meat and milk and
lives Wherever is a rich banquet it goes back to the grass Howso-
ever men break bread together or eat alone it is grass giving them life
and they could pray "Give us this day our daily grass"

And many, many are the grass families From oats and corn to blue grass
and timothy hay, from rye and rice to clover and alfalfa, the grass
families are many and humble and hard to kill unless misused and
overdriven The populations of the grass are lush and green with care
in the sun and rain and recurring seasons The grass carries benedic-
tions and fables of service, toil and misuse To whom does the grass
belong if not to the people?

53

COME on, superstition, and get my goat

I got mascots

The stars of my birthday favor me

The numbers from one to ten are with me

I was born under a lucky star and nothing can stop me

The moon was a waxing moon and not a waning moon when I was born

Every card in the deck and both of the seven-eleven bones are with me

So you hear them tell it and they mean if it works it's good and if it don't
it costs nothing

How to win love, how to win games, the spells and conjurations are named
for fever, burns, convulsions, snakebite, milksick, balking horses, rheu-
matism, warts

"Tie the heart of a bat with a red silk string to your right arm and you
will win every game at which you play"

If your right foot itches you will soon start on a journey, if it's your left
foot you will go where you are not wanted

If you sing before breakfast you will cry before night, if you sneeze before
breakfast you will see your true love before Saturday night

Lightning in the north means rain, lightning in the south means dry
weather

Frost three months after the first katydid is heard Three white frosts and
then a rain

For toothache the faith doctor wrote the words "galla gaffa gassa" on the
wall With a nail he pointed at each letter of the words, asking if the
toothache was better At the letter where the tooth was feeling easier
he drove the nail in and the tooth stopped aching Galla gaffa gassa
Gassa galla gaffa

Goofer dust comes from the goofer tree
Sprinkle it in the shoes of the woman you love and
she can never get away from you
Galla gaffa gassa

Even a lousy cur has his lucky days
Sweep dirt out of the door after night and
you sweep yourself out of a home
Shake the tablecloth out of doors after sunset
and you will never marry
The first to drive a hearse is the next to die
Kill cats, dogs or frogs and you die in rags
Point at a shooting star or even speak of it and
you lose your next wish

Better born lucky than rich
Marry in May, repent always
May is the month to marry bad wives

The son of the white hen brings luck
So does a horse with four white feet

He planted gravel and up came potatoes
When a bitch litters pigs that is luck
The lucky fellow gets eggs from his rooster
and his hen eggs have two yolks
Luck for the few, death for the many

Ladders of luck, let us
 climb your yellow rungs
 Ropes of the up-and-up
 send us silver sky-hooks
 Black horses, let us saddle
 you with silk belly-bands
 Black cats with orange spots
 bring us big ships loaded
 with wild Spanish women
 Galloping cubes of fate
 hand us sevens elevens
 hand us the pretty numbers
 Black moonlight, let a little
 of that old gold drop down
 Black roses? Yes
 there must be cool black roses
 Out of the deep night came to us all
 the kiss of the black rose

54

TYLOR believed it important, he put it down, he asks us to read it, to look
 at it and see what happens
 "In the islands of the Indian Archipelago whose tropical forests swarm
 both with high apes and low savages, the confusion between the two
 in the minds of the half-civilized inhabitants becomes almost inextricable
 Tylor dwelt on the tales of men with tails, homo caudatus or satyr, how
 you hear about them if you go hither and yon over the earth
 "To people who at once believe monkeys a kind of savages, and savages a
 kind of monkeys, men with tails are creatures coming under both definitions"
 The longer you look at it the more the confusions shift in the shaded
 areas denoting who belongs where

55

ON Lang Syne Plantation they had a prayer
 "When we rise in the morning
 to see the sun plowing his furrow across the elements,

we are thankful
For the rising of the east moon we have seen tonight
and for the setting of the west moon we shall see,
we are thankful
And O Lord—
When my room is like a public hall,
when my face is like a looking-glass,
when my teeth shut against a silence,
mother do me no good then,
father do me no good then,
sister, brother, friend, do me no good then
Help us to know—
when our hands rest from the plow handle and lie still—
when we are like hills gone down in darkness—
when our nostrils are empty of breath—
then let us know when we trust in Thee—
 Thou art a crutch to the lame,
 a mother to the motherless,
 a father to the fatherless,
 a strong arm to the widow,
 a shade from the heat,
 a bridge over deep water ”

The little lake with the long name in Massachusetts is called Chaugh Jog a Gog Maugh Chaugh a Gog Chaugh Buna Guncha Maugh wherein the red men intended We own to the middle of the lake on this side, you own to the middle of the lake on the other side, and both of us own the middle

 Oh angel, oh angel,
I don't want to be burned in the storm
 Who's going to close these dying eyes?
 Dig my grave with a golden spade
 Lower me down with a silver chain
 The coffin lid will screw me down
I don't want to be burned in the storm
 Who's going to close these dying eyes?
 Oh angel, oh angel

56

THE sacred legion of the justborn—
how many thousands born this minute?
how many fallen for soon burial?
what are these deaths and replacements?
what is this endless shuttling of shadowlands
where the spent and done go marching into one
and from another arrive those crying Mama Mama?

In the people is the eternal child,
the wandering gypsy, the pioneer homeseeker,
the singer of home sweet home

The people say and unsay,
put up and tear down
and put together again—
a builder, wrecker, and builder again—
this is the people

The shrouding of obedience to immediate necessity,
The mask of "What do I care?" to cover "What else can I do?"
One half-real face put on to hide a more real face under,
The waiting of the hope of the inner face while the outer face
Holds to its look and says yes to immediate necessity,
Says yes to whatever is for the immediate moment—
This is the pokerface of the populace never read till long afterward

The people in several longdrawn chapters seems a monster turtle
Heavy years go by, heavy hundreds of years, till a shroud and mask drop,
Till the faces of events command the new faces of people,
And new chapters begin with new faces

Protective coloration is only for birds and moths who take on the look
of the leaves and bark they live in?
Out of long usage the ruled-over acquire devices by the ways of animals
who blend with the landscape
They can drop into long deep sleeps, they can hide out and hibernate till
a time of release develops

In the long night streets of snakeline lights
 when there is bitter crying for leadership
 and no leadership steps forth
 is it because the masses and the intelligentsia
 both are a wornout soil so thin and acrid
 they cannot fling up leaders?
 When the creative breath blows not over the waters
 and elders are filled with hypocritical effluvia,
 when the silent workers in pure science
 are considered inferior to public utility manipulators
 is this the time for the young to begin movements,
 to question the ways of hypocritical elders
 in the long night streets of snakeline lights?

aw nuts aw go peddle yer papers
 where did ja cop dat monkeyface
 jeez ja see dat skirt
 did ja glom dat moll
 who was tellin you we wuz brudders
 how come ya get on dis side deh street
 go home and tell yer mudder she wants yuh
 chase yer shadder aroun deh corner
 yuh come to me wid a lot uh arkymalarky
 a bing in de bean fer you yeah
 how come ya get on dis side deh street
 go home and get yer umbreller washed
 den get yer face lifted
 dis corner is mine—see—dis corner is mine
 gwan ja tink ya gonna get dis f'm me fer nuttin
 nobody gets nuttin fer nuttin
 gwan monkeyface peddle yer papers
 ya can't kiss yerself in here dis is all fixed

Those without a leader perish,
 says the Sanskrit,
 those without a youthful leader perish,
 those without a female leader perish,
 those without many leaders perish

The people pause for breath, for wounds and bruises to heal,
 For food again after famine, for regaining stamina,

For preparations and migration to greener pastures, to canaan, to america,
to the argentine, australia, new zealand, alaska,
To farflung commonwealths lacking precedent or tradition
They guess and toil and rest and try to make out and get along
And some would rather not talk about what they had to go through
In the first years of finding out what the soil might do for them,
In the first winter of snow too deep for travel, or
The first summer when the few clouds showing went away without rain, or
The day the grasshoppers came and tore a black path where the crops had
stood

The people is a monolith,
a mover, a dirt farmer,
a desperate hoper

The prize liar comes saying, "I know how, listen to me and I'll bring you
through "

The guesser comes saying, "The way is long and hard and maybe what I
offer will work out "

The people choose and the people's choice more often than not is one
more washout

Yet the strong man, the priceless one who wants nothing for himself and
has his roots among his people,

Comes often enough for the people to know him and to win through into
gains beyond later losing,

Comes often enough so the people can look back and say, "We have come
far and will go farther yet "

The people is a trunk of patience, a monolith.

"And the king wanted an inscription
good for a thousand years and after
that to the end of the world?"

"Yes, precisely so "

"Something so true and awful that no
matter what happened it would stand?"

"Yes, exactly that "

"Something no matter who spit on it or
laughed at it there it would stand
and nothing would change it?"

"Yes, that was what the king ordered
his wise men to write "

"And what did they write?"

"Five words THIS TOO SHALL PASS AWAY"

57

LINCOLN?

He was a mystery in smoke and flags
saying yes to the smoke, yes to the flags,
yes to the paradoxes of democracy,
yes to the hopes of government
of the people by the people for the people,
no to debauchery of the public mind,
no to personal malice nursed and fed,
yes to the Constitution when a help,
no to the Constitution when a hindrance,
yes to man as a struggler amid illusions,
each man fated to answer for himself
Which of the faiths and illusions of mankind
must I choose for my own sustaining light
to bring me beyond the present wilderness?

Lincoln? was he a poet?
and did he write verses?

"I have not willingly planted a thorn
in any man's bosom"

"I shall do nothing through malice, what
I deal with is too vast for malice"

Death was in the air
So was birth
What was dying few could say
What was being born none could know

He took the wheel in a lashing roaring
hurricane
And by what compass did he steer the course
of the ship?
"My policy is to have no policy," he said in
the early months,
And three years later, "I have been controlled
by events"

He could play with the wayward human mind, saying at Charleston, Illinois, September 18, 1858, it was no answer to an argument to call a man a liar

"I assert that you [pointing a finger in the face of a man in the crowd] are here today, and you undertake to prove me a liar by showing that you were in Mattoon yesterday

"I say that you took your hat off your head and you prove me a liar by putting it on your head"

He saw personal liberty across wide horizons

"Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid," he wrote Joshua F. Speed, August 24, 1855 "As a nation we began by declaring that 'all men are created equal, except negroes' When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read 'all men are created equal except negroes and foreigners and Catholics' When it comes to this, I shall prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty"

Did he look deep into a crazy pool
and see the strife and wrangling
with a clear eye, writing the military
head of a stormswept area

"If both factions, or neither, shall abuse
you, you will probably be about right Be-
ware of being assailed by one and praised
by the other?"

Lincoln? was he a historian?
did he know mass chaos?
did he have an answer for those
who asked him to organize chaos?

"Actual war coming, blood grows hot, and blood is spilled Thought is forced from old channels into confusion Deception breeds and thrives Confidence dies and universal suspicion reigns

"Each man feels an impulse to kill his neighbor, lest he be first killed by him Revenge and retaliation follow And all this, as before said, may be among honest men only, but this is not all

"Every foul bird comes abroad and every dirty reptile rises up. These add crime to confusion.

"Strong measures, deemed indispensable, but harsh at best, such men make worse by maladministration Murders for old grudges, and murders for pelf, proceed under any cloak that will best cover for the occasion These causes amply account for what has happened in Missouri "

Early in '64 the Committee of the New York Workingman's Democratic Republican Association called on him with assurances and he meditated aloud for them, recalling race and draft riots

"The most notable feature of a disturbance in your city last summer was the hanging of some working people by other working people It should never be so

"The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people, of all nations and tongues and kindreds

"Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him labor diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built "

Lincoln? did he gather
the feel of the American dream
and see its kindred over the earth?

"As labor is the common burden of our race,
so the effort of some to shift
their share of the burden
onto the shoulders of others
is the great durable curse of the race "

"I hold,
if the Almighty had ever made a set of men
that should do all of the eating
and none of the work,
he would have made them
with mouths only, and no hands,
and if he had ever made another class,
that he had intended should do all the work
and none of the eating,
he would have made them
without mouths and all hands "

“—the same spirit that says, ‘You toil and work and earn bread, and I’ll eat it’ No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of their labor, or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle ”

“As I would not be a *slave*, so I would not be a *master* This expresses my idea of democracy Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy ”

“I never knew a man who wished to be himself a slave Consider if you know any good thing that no man desires for himself ”

“The sheep and the wolf
are not agreed upon a definition
of the word liberty ”

“The whole people of this nation
will ever do well
if well done by ”

“The plainest print cannot be read
through a gold eagle ”

“How does it feel to be President?” an Illinois friend asked

“Well, I’m like the man they rode out of town on a rail He said if it wasn’t for the honor of it he would just as soon walk ”

Lincoln? he was a dreamer
He saw ships at sea,
he saw himself living and dead
in dreams that came

Into a secretary's diary December 23, 1863
went an entry "The President tonight
had a dream He was in a party of plain
people, and, as it became known who
he was, they began to comment on his
appearance One of them said 'He is a
very common-looking man' The Presi-
dent replied 'The Lord prefers com-
mon-looking people That is the reason
he makes so many of them' "

He spoke one verse for then and now
"If we could first know where we are,
and whither we are tending,
we could better judge
what to do, and how to do it "

58

THE people, yes,
Out of what is their change
from chaos to order
and chaos again?

"Yours till the hangman doth us part,"
Don Magregor ended his letters

"It annoys me to die,"
said a philosopher
"I should like to see what follows "

To those who had ordered them to death,
one of them said
"We die because the people are asleep
and you will die because the people will awaken "

Greek met Greek when Phocion and Democritus spoke
"You will drive the Athenians mad some day and they will kill you"
"Yes, me when they go mad, and as sure as they get sane again, you"

59

THE transient tar-paper shack
comes from the hands of the people
So does the floodlighted
steel-and-concrete skyscraper
The rough-lumber two-room houseboat
is from the hands of the people
So is the turbine-driven steamboat
with ballroom, orchestra, swimming-pool,
the fat of the land,
moving in the mid-atlantic ocean

Every day the people of the city haul it away,
take it apart, and put it together again
Every day around the globe and its atmos-
pheric fringe the people of the earth live
the unwritten saga of one day
Today the fishing boats go out and little men
shade their eyes and study the treacher-
ous, rolling, free-handed sea
Today the steel-and-aluminum streamlined
passenger train cuts through a blizzard,
the transcontinental planes are hung up,
and a liner at sea sends a distress wireless.
Today strikes break out where strikes were
never heard of before, the lumber trade
stands in fear of steel-fabricated houses,
and farming in Somaliland is a hazard
Every hour thousands of six-decker novels
lived, every minute millions of long and
short stories
Today homes are lost, farms won, cars traded
in, old furniture lacquered, pigs littered,
an albatross shot, pearls lost in Vienna
found in a fishcan in Omaha.

Today jobs landed and lost, contracts signed
and broken, families scattered and joined,
girls after long waiting saying Yes to men
No to men
The books of man have begun only a short
stammering memorandum of the toil,
resources and stamina of man,
Of the required errands, the dramatic impulses,
the irresistible songs of this given moment,
this eyeblink now
Every day the people of the city haul it away,
take it apart, and put it together again
The how and the why of the people so doing
is the saga not yet written

Is the story true or a make-believe?
In an ancient clan the elders found one of the
younger, a man of dreaminess, writing a
scroll and record
Where he had picked up letters and the for-
bidden art of putting down one word
after another so as to make sense, they
didn't know and he refused to tell
On sheets to be read long after by other
generations he was doing an eye-witness
tale of their good and evil doings
And he swore to them "I will be the word of
the people! Mine is the bleeding mouth
from which the gag is snatched!"
So they took and killed him and set his bloody
head on a pike for public gaze Who had
asked him to be the word of the people?
When they wanted a history written they
would elect someone to write it as they
would have it written

"You will see me surrender,"
said one old Viking,
"when hair grows in the palm of my hand"

"What are you fellows scared of? nothing?"
this too they asked the old Viking who said,
"Yes, one thing we are scared of, we are scared
the sky might come tumbling down on us"

60

THE grass lives, goes to sleep, lives again,
and has no name for it
The oaks and poplars know seasons while standing
to take what comes
The grinding of the earth on its gnarled axis
touches many dumb brothers
Time toils on translations of fire and rain into
air, into thin air

In the casual drift of routine
in the day by day run of mine
in the play of careless circumstance
the anecdotes emerge
alive with people in words, errands,
motives and silhouettes
taller than the immediate moment

"You have fourteen sons in the war?"
"Yes "
"And you have more children at home?"
"Five "
"And they all came one by one?"
"No, they was four pair twins, two sets triplets"

"I remember," said the fond Irish mother to the white-headed boy, "I remember when you was nothing but a beautiful gleam in your father's eye "

"Breath is made out of air," wrote the schoolboy
"We breathe with our lungs If it wasn't for our breath we
would die when we slept Our breath keeps the life going
through the nose when we sleep "

Back and forth strode the campaign orator,
back and forth till an Irishman shouted
"If you're talkin' stop walkin'!
If you're walkin' stop talkin'!"

The classical orator from Massachusetts had pronounced the words "Vox Populi" five times in an Indianapolis speech when one Hoosier Congressman bet another he didn't know what Vox Populi meant. The money was put up and the winner of the bet freely translated Vox Populi to mean "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

"There on the same track I saw the westbound passenger train coming
fifty miles an hour and the eastbound freight forty miles an hour."
"And what did you think?"
"I thought what a hell of a way to run a railroad!"

"Is you married?" the elder negro asked his son
"I ain't sayin' I is and I ain't sayin' I ain't"
"I ain't askin' you is you ain't Ise askin' you ain't you is."

They were ninety years old and of their seventeen children had just buried
the firstborn son who died seventy-two years of age
"I told you," said the old man as he and his hillborn wife sat on the cabin
steps in the evening sunset, "I told you long ago we would never raise
that boy."

"I am John Jones."
"Take a chair."
"Yes, and I am the son of John
Throckmorton Jones."
"Is that possible? Take two chairs."

"What's the matter up there?"
"Playing soldier."
"But soldiers don't make that kind of noise."
"We're playing the kind of soldier that
makes that kind of noise."

"No, captain, I never stole nothing to eat out
of that chest. Why, captain, when I

looked in that chest to see if there was
anything to eat in it I met a cockroach
coming out of it with tears in his eyes ”

“How do you do, my farmer friend?”

“Howdy ”

“Nice looking country you have here ”

“Fer them that likes it ”

“Live here all your life?”

“Not yit ”

61

THE nickels click off fares in the slot machines of the subway, the elevated
“Fare, please,” say the bus conductors to millions every day of the week
Riders they are, riders to work, to home, to fun, to grief, each nickel and
dime audited and accounted for as current income payable for taxes,
overhead, upkeep, rehabilitation, surplus, dividends, flimflam
To the whang and purr of steel and motors, streets and stations, the fares,
the riders, with nickels and dimes, go and return, return and go
One in a thousand says, “Whither goest thou?” but mostly “Where you
going?”

Mostly they are in accord with the Minnesota Swede

“Maybe I don’t know so much but what I do know I know to beat hell ”

Like tools tested for grinding and cutting and durability, they have gathered
them clews of wisdom and they talk things over in the bus, the
elevated, the subway

“The penitentiary is to learn to behave better, to think things over,
it is lonesome ”

“A comedian acts funny and gets paid to make people laugh if he
can ”

“Shakespeare is the greatest writer of them all, a dead Englishman
and you have to read him in high school or you don’t pass ”

“The police pass examinations and then get a club and a star to
show who they are They keep order and arrest you unless you
got a pull ”

“Handkerchief is to carry in the pocket and blow your nose with and
tie nickels in the corner of for carfare and church ”

“Economy is when you save without being stingy.”

“Banks keep money when you have some left over. They let nobody
else get it And they let you take money out if you pay for it and
do what is regular.”

"The Constitution tells how the government runs It is a paper in Washington for the lawyers"

"War is when two nations go to it killing as many as you can for the government"

"The army is men in uniforms, they go away and fight till they come back or you hear from them"

"The president is the same as a king four years signing bills in the White House and meeting people He can do whatever he wants to unless he is stopped"

"Oath is what you swear to in court that you will tell everything God help you and hold nothing back no matter what"

"Poverty is when you work hard, live cheap and can't pay up, you figure and you can't tell where you're coming out at"

"Liberty is when you are free to do what you want to do and the police never arrest you if they know who you are and you got the right ticket"

"The past is long ago and you can't touch it Tomorrow today will be yesterday and belong in the past, like that, see?"

The ingenuity of the human mind and what passes the time of day for the millions who keep their serenity amid the relentless processes of wresting their provender from the clutch of tongs organized against them—this is always interesting and sometimes marvelous

Daily is death and despair stood off by those who in hard trials know how and when to laugh

The fox counts hens in his dreams The eagle has an empire in the air Man under his hat has several possessions of comedy

The name of a stub line under the Lone Star banner is The Houston Eastern and Western Texas railroad

On the passenger and freight cars is the monogram, the initials H E W T

And nearly everybody in the territory traversed and the adjacent right of way calls it "Hell Either Way you Take It"

The Never Did and Couldn't railway is the N D & C Newburgh, Duchess and Connecticut

The Delay Linger and Wait is the D L & W, the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western

Come Boys and Quit Railroad
ran the slogan of the 1888 engineers'
strike on the C B & Q RR, the Chicago Burlington & Quincy
Rail Road

The floors of the new horse stables were translucent tile, the drink-
ing fountains of marble, the mangers of mahogany, the feed-
boxes furbished with silver trimmings and inlays

"Well, gentlemen," said the proprietor to his inspecting friends, "is
there anything you can think of that is lacking?"

"I can think of nothing," said an irreverent one, "unless you want
to put in a sofa for each horse"

62

Without the daily chores of the people
the milk trucks would have no milk
the markets neither meat nor potatoes
the railroad and bus timetables
would be on the fritz

and the shippers saying, "Phooey!"
And daily the chores are done
with heavy toil here, light laughter there,
the chores of the people, yes

In a drought year when one dust storm came
chasing another across a western town

Out of a Santa Fé day coach a passenger stuck
his head and queried a citizen

"What's the name of this mean measly dirty
dreary dried-up low-down burg?"

The citizen responding, "That's near enough,
stranger, let it go at that"

When the railway stockholder reminded the
brakeman of orders to call stations in a
clear tenor voice, the brakeman inquired
"What kind of a tenor voice do you ex-
pect for forty dollars a month?"

The meat wholesaler took in hand one of his
salesmen "You've got a bright head and

your ideas run away with you Don't be
so bright when you tackle a customer Be
dumb Look dumb They will appreciate
you better that way "

On a Baton Rouge headstone they carved
His last words were
"I die as I lived—
a Christian and a Democrat "

An Arkansas huckleberry cavalry commander
got his men into action with
"Prepare to git on your creeters—git!"

"How many of yez down in the pit?"
"Five "
"The half of yez come up and be quick "

"Men, will yez fight or will yez run?"
"We will "
"Yez will what?"
"We will not "
"I t'ought yez would "

The restaurant cashier glanced at the check
he handed her and told him "I am very sorry
but we have an arrangement with the banks
that they don't sell soup and we don't take
checks "

Phone girl "I'm sorry I gave you the wrong number "
Man "I'm sorry too, I know it was a perfectly good
number you gave me but I just couldn't use it "

"I'd hate to be up there in that," murmured one studying
an airplane in a tailspin, another murmuring, "I'd hate
to be up there and not be in that "

Man going up elevator
"We eat, work, sleep, then we die—eh?"
Elevator boy "Yeah."

The people laugh
From a light easy humming
to the raucous guffaw and the brutal jeer
the people laugh
The decisions of the people
as to how they shall laugh and when
and how loud and at whom and how long—
This is not covered in the vaudevillians saying
every audience is ninety per cent squirrels
and ten per cent nuts and the squirrels are
more to be considered than the nuts, almost
an axiom comes from the same vaudevillians
what in one hour entertains and goes over big
in another hour starts a riot the old reliable
jokes fail hokum demands a new formula
the query runs, "What are they laughing at this
year?"

"We got butter and we got the Kaiser," taunted the Dutch boy across
the border

"We got Hitler," argued the German lad from his side of the fence be-
tween the two countries

"We got butter, we got the Kaiser," repeated the Dutch boy, "and we're
going to get Hitler"

"Have you a criminal lawyer in this burg?"

"We think so but we haven't been able to prove
it on him"

"What's become of your two boys that grew up
since I saw you last?"

"One is dead and the other is in the real estate
business in Wichita"

"Am I the first girl you ever kissed?"

"No, but I want you to know I am a lot more
particular than I used to be"

The Kansas City girl out of finishing school "If you've got the right
kind of a face and personality you don't need the education and if
you haven't got the face and personality you can never get educa-
tion enough"

"Yesterday," said the college boy home on vacation, "we autoed to the country club, golfed till dark, bridged a while, and autoed home"
"Yesterday," said the father, "I muled to the cornfield and gee-hawed till sundown, then I suppered till dark, piped till nine, bedstedded till five, breakfasted and went muling again"

A farmhand seeing the letters "P C" in a
dream asked if it meant "Preach Chrst,"
his pastor counseling, "Perhaps it means
Plow Corn"

Even those who have read books on manners are sometimes a pain in the neck

If there is a bedbug in a hotel when I arrive he looks at the register for my room number

They invited themselves to the party "If you are verandah then we are ash can"

The fourth time they threw the unwelcome guest downstairs he dusted himself off and called, "I know why you throw me out, you don't want me up there"

At the third stop out of St Louis where he was again kicked from the vestibule platform, the traveler picked himself up and told an inquirer, "It's nothing at all I'm going to Cincinnati if my pants hold out"

He sat on a hot stove and didn't say a thing except, "Isn't there something burning?"

The joker who threw an egg into the electric fan soon was stood on his tin ear

One audience may wheeze like a calliope with sore tonsils and another roar like a burning lumber yard

Some of them, as you look closer, are slow as molasses in January—or quick as greased lightning

Some are noisy as a cook-stove falling downstairs, and others quiet as an eel swimming in oil

They have met salesmen and politicians low as a baboon's forehead, low as a snake's belt-buckle

Sure as a wild goose never laid a tame egg, they understand a crooked tree throws only a crooked shadow

They have heard of men trying to keep the sea back with a pitchfork

They have seen cutups funny as a barrel of monkeys turn gloomy as a graveyard on a wet Sunday

They have seen one limber as an eelskin finally locked in like a fly in
amber

“Sometimes paying on the installment plan is for all the world like pick-
ing feathers out of molasses”

“Crooked as the letter Z, so crooked he could hide behind a corkscrew,
so crooked he couldn’t fall down a well, so crooked he can’t lie
straight in bed”

The poker party ran through Saturday night and Sunday and they came
out with eyes like burnt holes in an army blanket

Once in a blue moon something happens so they say it is rare as a snow-
bird in hell

There’s nothing to be scared of—unless you’re afraid of a paper tiger
The woman who’ll kiss and tell is small as the little end of nothing

In the daily labor of the people
by and through which life goes on
the people must laugh or go down

The slippery roads, icy tools, stalled engines, snowdrifts, hot boxes, cold
motors, wet matches, mixed signals, time schedules, washouts,

The punch-clock, the changes from decent foremen to snarling straw
bosses, the sweltering July sun, the endless pounding of a blizzard,
the sore muscles, the sudden backache and the holding on for all the
backache,

The quick thinking in wrecks and breakdowns, the fingers and thumbs
clipped off by machines, the machines that behave no better no
worse no matter what you call them, the coaxing of a machine and
fooling with it till all of a sudden she starts and you’re not sure
why,

A ladder rung breaking and a legbone or armbone with it, layoffs and no
paycheck coming, the red diphtheria card on the front door, the
price for a child’s burial casket, hearse and cemetery lot,

The downrun from butter to oleo to lard to sorghum, the gas meter on
the blink, the phone taken out, the bills and again bills, for each ten
dollars due ten cents to pay with or nothing to pay with only debts
and debts,

The human sardines of the rush hour car and bus, the gnawing fear of
defeat till a workman never before licked says now-I’m-licked, the
boy who says to-hell-with-work-you-never-got-anywhere-working-and-
I’m-going-to-be-a-bum-good-by, the girl who doesn’t know which way
to go and has a wild look about it,

The pleasant surprises of changing weather when the saying passes it's-a-nice-day-isn't-it and they-can't-take-this-away-from-us, the shine of spring sunlight on a new planted onion patch after bright rain, the slow learning of what makes a good workman and the comfort of handling good tools, the joy of working with the right kind of a crew and a foreman who is "one of us," a foreman who understands, The lurking treachery of machinery, good printers cursing "the innate cussedness of inanimate things," the pouring of molten ore at the right nick and the timing of the clutch of a crane or a lifting derrick or the dump of a steam shovel or the toss of a hawser from boatdeck to dockpost or the slowing to a stop for a red light or the eye on the clock for the deadline of a job marked rush, The grades and lines of workmen, how one takes care and puts the job through with the least number of motions and another is careless and never sure what he is doing and another is careful and means well but the gang knows he belongs somewhere else and another is a slouch for work but they are glad to have him for his jokes and clowning

The people laugh, yes, the people laugh
 They have to in order to live and survive under lying politicians, lying labor skates, lying racketeers of business, lying newspapers, lying ads
 The people laugh even at lies that cost them toil and bloody exactions
 For a long time the people may laugh, until a day when the laughter changes key and tone and has something it didn't have
 Then there is a scurrying and a noise of discussion and an asking of the question what is it the people want
 Then there is the pretense of giving the people what they want, with jokers, trick clauses, delays and continuances, with lawyers and fixers, playboys and ventriloquists, bigtime promises
 Time goes by and the gains are small for the years go slow, the people go slow, yet the gains can be counted and the laughter of the people foretokening revolt carries fear to those who wonder how far it will go and where to block it

63

In a winter sunset near Springfield, Illinois
 In the coming on of a winter gloaming,
 A Negro miner with headlamp and dinner bucket,
 A black man explained how it happens
 In some of the mines only white men are hired,
 Only white men can dig out the coal

Yet he would strike if the strike was right
 And, "For a just cause I'd live in the fields
 on hard corn"

White man "You take the crow and I'll take
 the turkey or I'll take the turkey and you
 take the crow"
 Indian "You don't talk turkey to me once"

In a corn-belt village after a Sunday game
 a fan said to a farmhand second baseman
 "You play great ball, boy, a little more time
 for practice and you could make the big
 leagues"
 "Sure, I know it, shoveling cow manure, that's
 all that holds me back"

64

No matter how thick or how thin you slice it it's still baloney
 I would if I could and I could if I would but if I couldn't how could I,
 could you?
 I never made a mistake in grammar but once in my life and as soon as
 I done it I seen it
 He was a good shoveler but I don't know as I would say he was a fancy
 shoveler
 "You're always talking about liberty, do you want liberty?" "I don't know
 as I do and I don't know as I do"
 "The train is running easier now" "Yes, we're off the track now"
 The chorus goes, "They take him by the hand, and they lead him to the
 land, and the farmer is the man who feeds them all"
 "I hear a burglar in the house" "Wait, if he finds anything worth steal-
 ing we'll take it away from him"
 "Did you say the sky is the limit?" "Yes, we won't go any higher than
 the sky"
 "That dwarf ain't worth ten cents to see—he's five feet high if he's a
 foot" "Exactly, my good sir, he's the tallest dwarf in the world"

The sea rolls easy and smooth
 Or the sea roars and goes wild

The smell of clams and fish comes
out of the sea

The sea is nothing to look at
unless you want to know something
unless you want to know
where you came from

The more things change the more they are the same.
The worse things are the better they are
Things will not get better till they've been worse
When everyone is wrong then everyone is right
Everybody was wrong and nobody was to blame

The windjammer drew into harbor after a long cruise
and they gathered around the captain for a good-by
and they understood exactly what he meant
and it seemed like old times to hear him roar

"You can all go to hell
and I'm damned glad to be rid of you"

Why did they cheer him unless he was one of them?

The Mexicans give a toast
salud pesetas tiempo para gastarse son,
health, money, time, what are they for but spending?

The hoary English folk saying, "He'd skin a
louse and send the hide to market," is sur-
passed in gayety by the antique Persian
proverb, "He snatches away a flea's hat,"
meaning his calculations are very small,
indeed, indeed He could sit down and
figure out how it might be possible to
sneak up on a flea, snatch off its hat, and
then by a circuitous route reach a market
place where he would deliver the hat in
exchange for what it might bring from
someone who had a pet flea suffering
for the want of a hat or from someone
collecting flea hats who wished to add
this particular specimen

Who do you think you are
and where do you think you came from?
From toenails to the hair of your head you are
mixed of the earth, of the air,
Of compounds equal to the burning gold and amethyst
lights of the Mountains of the Blood of Christ at Santa Fé
Listen to the laboratory man tell what you are
made of, man, listen while he takes you apart
Weighing 150 pounds you hold 3,500 cubic feet of
gas—oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen
From the 22 pounds and 10 ounces of carbon in
you is the filling for 9,000 lead pencils
In your blood are 50 grains of iron and in the rest
of your frame enough iron to make a spike
that would hold your weight
From your 50 ounces of phosphorus could be made
800,000 matches and elsewhere in your physical
premises are hidden 60 lumps of sugar, 20 teaspoons
of salt, 38 quarts of water, two ounces
of lime, and scatterings of starch, chloride of
potash, magnesium, sulphur, hydrochloric acid
You are a walking drug store and also a cosmos and
a phantasmagoria treading a lonesome valley,
one of the people, one of the minions and
myrmidons who would like an answer to the
question, "Who and what are you?"
One of the people seeing sun, fog, zero weather,
seeing fire, flood, famine, having meditations
On fish, birds, leaves, seeds,
Skins and shells emptied of living form,
The beautiful legs of Kentucky thoroughbreds
And the patience of army mules

The sea holds colors in its own way
below 55 fathoms no black,
below 300 fathoms no red, violet, white, gray,
below 600 fathoms no purple, green, orange
"yellow and brown occur at all depths"

What have you above the ears?
Or are you dead from the neck up?
If you don't look out for yourself nobody else will
What counts most is what you got under your own hat
Your best friend is yourself
Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost
I'm the only one of my friends I can count on
I'm not in business for my health
I'm a lone wolf, I work by myself
I'm for me, myself and company
Who said you could work this side of the street?

God loves the thief but he also loves the owner
The big thieves hang the little thieves
Set a thief to catch a thief
Office without pay makes thieves
The carpenters have sinned and the tailors are hanged.
He must have killed a few to get what he's got
They'll sell you anything, even the blue sky
Have you seen one man selling the ocean to another?
A farmer between two lawyers is a fish between two cats

The rich own the land and the poor own the water
The rich get richer and the poor get children
The rich have baby napkins, the poor have diapers
The big houses have small families and the small houses big families
Why did Death take the poor man's cow and the rich man's child?

65

THE mazuma, the jack, the shekels, the kale,
The velvet, the you-know-what,
The what-it-takes, a roll, a wad,
Bring it home, boy
Bring home the bacon
Start on a shoestring if you have to
Then get your first million
The second million is always easier than the first

And if you get more of them round iron men than you
can use you can always throw them at the birds
it's been done

Now take some men, everything they touch turns into money they know
how the land lays they can smell where the dollars grow

Money withers if you don't know how to nurse it along money flies away
if you don't know where to put it

The first question is, Where do we raise the money, where is the cash
coming from?

A little horse sense helps an idea and horse sense
take you far if you got a scheme ask yourself,
Will it work?

And let me put one bug in your ear inside information helps how many
fortunes came from a tip, from being on the ground first, from hear-
ing a piece of news, from fast riding, early buying, quick selling, or
plain dumb luck?

Yes, get Lady Luck with you and you're made some fortunes were tum-
bled into and the tumblers at first said, Who would have believed it?
and later, I knew just how to do it

Yes, Lady Luck counts before you're born pick the right papa and mama
and the newsreel boys will be on the premises early for a shot of you
with your big toe in your mouth

Money is power so said one
Money is a cushion so said another
Money is the root of evil so said
still another
Money means freedom so runs an old
saying

And money is all of these—and more
Money pays for whatever you want—if
you have the money
Money buys food, clothes, houses, land,
guns, jewels, men, women, time to be
lazy and listen to music
Money buys everything except love,
personality, freedom, immortality,
silence, peace

Therefore men fight for money
Therefore men steal, kill, swindle,
 walk as hypocrites and whited
 sepulchers
Therefore men speak softly carrying
 plans, poisons, weapons, each in the
 design The words of his mouth were
 as butter but war was in his heart
Therefore nations lay strange holds on
 each other, bombardments open, tanks
 advance, salients are seized, aviators
 walk on air, truckloads of amputated
 arms and legs are hauled away

Money is power, freedom, a cushion, the
 root of all evil, the sum of blessings

 "Tell us what is money
For we are ignorant of money, its ways and
 meanings,
Each a child in a dark storm where people
 cry for money"

Where the carcass is the buzzards gather
Where the treasure is the heart is also
 Money breeds money
 Money runs the world
Money talk is bigger than talk talk
No ear is deaf to the song that gold sings
Money is welcome even when it stinks
Money is the sinew of love and of war
Money breaks men and ruins women
 Money is a great comfort
 Every man has his price
There are men who can't be bought
There are women beyond purchase
When you buy judges someone sells justice
You can buy anything except day and night

66

THE poobahs rise and hold their poobah sway
till their use is over
and other poobahs hitherto unheard of
step into their shoes and sit at the big tables
and have their say-so
till events order the gong for them
and the fathers can never arrange for the sons
to be what the fathers were
in the days that used to be not for long
 both the people and the poobahs—
 life will not let them be
A little bird flits to the window-sills
 morning by morning
“Whither goest thou? whither and whither?”

They die at noon and midnight,
they are born in the morning, the afternoon,
and the river goes on
and the foamflecks of the river go on
 The same great river carries along
 its foamflecks of poobahs and plain people
 They and their houses go down the river,
 houses built for use or show
 down the crumbling stream they go—
cabins, frame lumber cottages, installment bungalows,
mail order residences picked from a catalogue,
mansions whose windows and gables laughed a rivalry,
 down the same river they all go
A few stand, a few last longer than others
while time and the rain, water and air and time
 have their way,
morning by morning the little birds on the window-sills
 “Whither goest thou? whither and whither?”

67

WAS he preaching or writing poetry or talking through his hat? He was
a Chinaman saying, “The fishes though deep in the water may be

hooked The birds though high in the air may be shot Man's heart only is out of reach The heavens may be measured The earth may be surveyed The heart of man alone is not to be known "

"Sleep softly, eagle forgotten," wrote an Illinois poet at the grave of the only governor of Illinois sure to be named by remote generations

"You have no ruins in America so I thought I would come and visit you," said an English lord to a paralyzed hobo poet in Camden, New Jersey

"The fundamental weakness in every empire and every great civilization was the weakness in the character of the upper classes," ventured a Yale professor in a solemn moment

"When historians of the future tell posterity what the World War was about, they will agree upon a cause that nobody who fought it ever suspected," said the chief of the high command of the Allied Armies

"Bring me my liar," said a king calling for the historian of the realm

"History is bunk," said a history-making motorcar king

"Words," added this motorcar king, "are a camouflage for what is going on in the mind "

"History is a fable agreed upon," said a shriveled smiling Frenchman

"Even if you prove it, who cares?" demanded an Illinois state librarian

"I shall arrange the facts and leave the interpretation to the reader," said the hopeful biographer to the somber historian

"The moment you begin to arrange you interpret," emitted the somber historian

"Do you make your newspaper for yourself or the public?" was asked a New York founder who replied, "For the public, of course "

"Why isn't your newspaper more intelligent?" was asked a Chicago publisher who laughed, "We make our newspaper for boobs "

"Secret influence is the greatest evil of our time," testified a Harvard president from a birthmarked anxious face

"And," added another world-renowned educator, "the crookedest crooks in the United States government have been well educated "

"Nevertheless," quoth an old-fashioned bibulous mayor of Milwaukee, "this dying for principle is all rot "

"Put a dollar on the shelf thirty days and you have a dollar," said one president of the Pennsylvania railroad "Put a workman on the shelf thirty days and you have a skeleton "

- "The struggle," said a delegate from the coal miners, "is between stockholders who do not labor as against laborers who do not hold stock "
- "The cry of 'Let us alone,' " urged a British commoner, "grows less resolute, more touched with frenzy "
- "Thou shalt not steal," added another commoner, "assumes thou shalt not be stolen from "
- "To cure the depression," said one adviser early in the depression, "you must put the patient on a rich, heavy diet because he is starving for nourishment and at the same time you must starve him because he is suffering and overstuffed with rich food "
- "You make rifles," said an eagle-faced old railroad fireman to ten thousand Chicago workingmen at a summer picnic, "you make rifles—and you're always at the wrong end of them "
- "The mystery of mysteries," contributed an engineer, "is to watch machinery making machinery "
- "Art," offered an artist, "is something you can't put into words and when you do it isn't art "
- "When I am not engaged in thought," said the possessor of one great mind, "I am employed in recovering from its effects "
- "Millionaires," said one having two hundred millions, "millionaires who laugh are rare "
- "War requires three things," urged a short commentator with a long head, "first, money, second, money, and third, money "
- "Man," spoke up an anthropologist, "is a two-legged animal without feathers, the only one who cooks his food, uses an alphabet, carries fire-arms, drinks when he is not thirsty, and practices love with an eye on birth control "
- "On the one hand an ignorant and arrogant government, and on the other hand a gang of ignorant and arrogant hoodlums—so often the voters must choose between these two," said a desperate registered voter in Philadelphia as he put a seidel of bock beer under his belt only two blocks from Independence Hall and the celebrated crack in the silent Liberty Bell
- "For what are we fighting?" inquired a Richmond editor in 1863 "An abstraction "
- "Peace and amity," said a Georgian in the same year, "is obstructed by only two circumstances, the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers, and Original Sin "
- "Sometimes," offered a Concord hermit building a hut for himself, "we

class those who are one-and-a-half-witted with the half-witted because we appreciate only a third of their wit "

"Broadway is a street," typed the colyumist, "where people spend money they haven't earned to buy things they don't need to impress people they don't like "

"You ask me what is my theory of the universe," the physicist replied, "when I haven't even a theory of magnetism "

"The great events of the world," submitted a historian, "take place in the brain "

"In the last analysis," propounded a California wheat novelist, "the people are always right—a literature which cannot be vulgarized is not literature at all and will perish "

"The durable culture of any nation," ventured another historian, "rests on the mind and genius of its common folk, the masses of the people "

In a hothouse room where sunlight never came
hundreds of monster plants winding and twisting
and by light and volume turned on and off
you could make them grow fast or slow—
you could see them trail in snake-vines,
explode into mammoth elephant ears

They crept and reeled in processions
Of obedient giant clowns and dwarfs, grotesques,
Symbols of an underworld not yet organized by man,
Tokens of plenty and hunger in the controls of man
And the master of these dumb clumsy growths,
A dwarf and a hunchback, a deep believer
In the spirit of man mastering maternal environment,
Out of Schenectady a wizard loving mankind in peak and abyss,
Saying science and invention are the enemies of human want
And the world is organized to abolish poverty
Whenever the people of the world so will

Mild and modest were the delegates meeting in
Basel in 1912 and resolving

"Let the governments remember they cannot
unleash a war without danger to themselves "

Mild and modest were the delegates meeting in
Geneva in 1934 and resolving

"Man is still, of all baggage, the most difficult to

transport, and so long as the occupational and geographical mobility of labor and the efficiency of its distribution among different avenues and places of employment are not improved at a rate corresponding to accelerated technical change, there is reason to expect the persistence of a higher volume of technological unemployment ”

“Listen to me,
brother
They’ll hand yuh anything
Look for the dirty work
Listen
Never see nothin’
Never know nothin’
Never tell nothin’
Then yuh’ll get along
If they want to frame on yuh,
they will ”

68

“THE drama of politics doesn’t interest me,” said a news rewrite man between beers “It’s only the people running around trying to change one gang of bandits for another gang of bandits ”

“I’ve written thousands of words about nothing,” said rewrite number two, “and I can do it again ”

“I don’t know anything,” chimed number three, “and come to think about it what I do know ain’t so ”

“What was it the doughboy wrote home?” a Sunday feature writer chipped in “Pershing stood at the tomb of Napoleon and said, ‘LaFollette, we are here!’ ”

“Next,” bumbled a city editor, “you’ll be telling about the cub who wired from the town on fire, ‘All is confusion can send nothing ’ ”

“Either that,” he went on, “or the lad whose assignment was to interview God and be sure to get a picture ”

“Or,” not yet being interrupted, “the utilities chief who brushed by Saint Peter at the gate of heaven saying, ‘I can’t bother with you, where’s God?’ ”

"I want money," said the editorial writer who knew where he got it, "in order to buy the time to get the things that money will not buy"

"If the utilities," the Sunday feature writer kicked in again, "could meter the moonlight the lovers would have to pay, pay, and pay"

"I love a few individuals," came a droll desk man, "but I've got a grudge in general against the human race"

"Me," came another desk man, "I hate a few individuals and outside of that I love the whole damn human family"

"Hell's bitches," a street man cut in, "are poverty, crime, ignorance and idleness Disease and insanity are final breakdowns ending long periods of anxiety, fear, worry, and unrest"

"He's reading books, the sonofagun," interrupted the city editor "He's going literary on us And how are we going to get out a paper without poverty and crime?"

"I found out it takes a smart man to be a crook," said a new lad on the police run "And then I got to asking why should a smart man want to be a crook? He doesn't have to"

"The way to be a big shot is don't know too much," a desk man offered "What you don't know won't hurt you"

"Man," said a hitherto silent Sunday feature writer, "is infinitely more important than the property he creates We cannot separate the individual from the work it produces Property does not exist outside and above the men who jointly produce it"

"He'll be joining the guild soon if he hasn't already got a card," the editorial writer editorialized "Bend thy neck, proud Sicambrian Adore what thou hast burned Burn what thou hast adored"

"May," a rewrite ended the session, "may the fair goddess, Fortune, fall deep in love with thee and prosperity be thy page"

"If you have nothing to do please don't do it here," said one of the rewrites opening the next day's session with a tall tankard

"Nevertheless," rejoined a rewrite, "I can tell you I met a discouraged undertaker today saying his business was to bury the dead and it looked to him as though the dead have stopped dying"

"And I," put in a member of the art department, "met an intellectual who says to me why don't you draw the pelican and all I could hand him was why do I want to draw the pelican since it's all there when you look at it and any of the camera boys can do it quicker"

One camera boy saying, "I have found woman to be the same as man, with slight alterations," another bumbled, "Thank God for those alterations"

- "I don't see," put in the new college lad on the police run, "why any man wants to kill another If he'll just wait the other man is going to die sometime anyhow "
- "It's like men chasing after women," said a rewrite "If they didn't the women would chase after them "
- "We ought to have a series of interviews," offered a desk man, "on whether the man chases the woman or whether it's the woman that chases the man, columns and columns with pictures and snappy captions "
- "They put on the wires today," said a unit from the telegraph desk, "an Irish poet saying when he's going to write a poem he has the same feeling a hen has when she's going to lay an egg "
- "That's news," believed the city editor "News is anything we think ought to be printed to gladden our readers' hearts or throw the fear of God into them "
- "We describe the revels of the rich," interposed a slightly illuminated assistant Sunday editor, "so the poor may enjoy in imagination the pleasures their purses will not permit them in reality "
- "Yet I notice," he went on, "my associates have considerable difficulty on various occasions in brightening and rendering readable the dull antics of the wives of the big advertisers "
- "And," he continued, "if the big advertiser himself gets into difficulties so notorious that something must be printed we soften the blow to the fullest extent and this is as it should be for advertising is the life blood of a newspaper and who are we that we should bite the hand that feeds us?"
- "You're a dirty radical bothered with a streak of the blessed Rotarian," put in a rewrite
- "In Moscow," interspersed one just back from Russia, "an English liberal tells me a bugler every morning steps out in front of the Kremlin and blows a long powerful blast and they ask him what for and he says, 'I am sounding the call for the international revolution of the united workers of the world who have nothing to lose but their chains and a world to gain,' and they ask him what he gets paid for this daily bugle call and he says, 'Not much—but it's a permanent job' "
- "For my part," an editorial writer ended his silence, "I begin each bright morning with praying Lord, give me this day my daily opinion and forgive me the one I had yesterday "
- "And I," rejoined the slightly illuminated one, "never quit dreaming of a time when every man is his own policeman, priest and editorial writer "

"You would wish yourself," the editorial writer had it, "out of your own job and me out of mine"

"Yes," as some of them prepared for the suburban trains, "one of these days science and invention will have rendered each one of us humble servants of the public a superfluous and unnecessary unit of labor and all we'll have to worry about is how to occupy our very valuable minds when there is nothing to do but nothing"

The city editor managed to have the final words

"I'll take vanilla! horsefeathers!"

69

"A LAWYER," hiccuped a disbarred member of the bar, "is a man who gets two other men to take off their clothes and then he runs away with them"

"If the law is against you, talk about the evidence," said a battered barrister "If the evidence is against you, talk about the law, and, since you ask me, if the law and the evidence are both against you, then pound on the table and yell like hell"

"The law," said the Acme Sucker Rod manufacturer who was an early Christian mayor of Toledo, Ohio, "the law is what the people will back up"

"You haven't climbed very high," said a Wall Street operator who was quoted in the press, "unless you own a judge or two"

Lawyer What was the distance between
the two towns?

Witness Two miles as the crow flies

Lawyer You mean as the fly flies

Judge No, he means as the fly crows

Between the Whig sheriff and the Democratic judge in Boone County, Missouri, was a breach wide enough to erect gallows

A visiting lawyer handed the judge a brief spattered with large goose-quill penmanship

The judge turned the document crossways and upside down scrutinizing it

“Can’t that judge of yours read writin’?”
 whispered the lawyer to the sheriff
 “No,” whispered the sheriff “He can’t
 read readin’, let alone writin’ ”

Who was the *twentieth* century lawyer who said of another lawyer, “He
 has one of the most enlightened minds of the *eighteenth* century”?
 and why did fate put both of them on the Supreme Court bench?

The surgeon held his profession the oldest in
 the world through the operation whereby
 Eve was made of rib from Adam
 The engineer held the world was once chaos
 and its reorganization a matchless engineer-
 ing feat
 The politician put in, “Who made that chaos?”
 And the laugh comes in there, a half a
 laugh, and come to think about it, less
 than half a laugh

70

THE tumblers of the rapids go white, go green,
 go changing over the gray, the brown, the rocks
 The fight of the water, the stones,
 the fight makes a foam laughter
 before the last look over the long slide
 down the spread of a sheen in the straight fall
 Then the growl, the chatter,
 down under the boom and the muffle,
 the hoo hoi deep,
 the hoo hoi down,
 this is Niagara

The human race in misery snarls.
 The writhing becomes a mob
 The mob is the beginning of something,
 Perhaps the mournful beginning
 Of a march out of darkness
 Into a lesser darkness

And so on until
The domes of smooth shadows
Space themselves in tall triangles
And nations exchange oleanders
Instead of gas, loot and hot cargo
The mob is a beginning, man lacking concert
The hanging mob hangs more than its victim
These seethings are a recoil and a downdrag
Each debauch costs
Fevers and rots run a course before growth

The mob is a beginning, man lacking concert
What is an army with banners and guns
Other than a mob given form and orders to kill?
And when will the nations exchange oleanders
Instead of gas, loot and hot cargo?

A train of soldiers passes
The khaki lads cheer, laugh, sing, and the flag goes by
They are young and the young time is the time to be gay, to sing, laugh,
cheer, even out of car windows on the way to mine strike duty
Some of these boys will be laid out stiff and flags will drape their coffins
Some of the mine strikers will be laid out stiff and flags drape their coffins
Faraway owners of the mines will read about it in morning papers along-
side breakfast

71

Who was that antique Chinese crook who put over his revolution and
let out a rooster crow "Burn all the books! history must begin
with us!"
What burned so inside of him that he must burn all the books? and
why do we all want to read those books just because he hated
them so?
Yet we hand him this He singled out no special lot of books for burn-
ing he hated books as such and wanted them all up in smoke
"Let history begin with us," was his cry and maybe it began and what
were its chapters and what was his name as its beginner?

What is history but a few Big Names plus
People?

What is a Big Name unless the people love it
or hate it
For what it did to them or for them while it
was in the going?
And this Big Name means pretense and plunder,
ashes and dung,
While another is armfuls of roses, enshrined
beyond speech

You may call spirits from the vasty deep,
Aye, you may—but will they come
When you call them?
You may sell an idea to the people
And sit back satisfied you have them your way
But will they stay sold on the idea?
Will they be easy to hold in line
Unless the idea has a promise of roots
Twisted deep in the heart of man
Being brought into play
As though justice between man and man
May yet breeze across the world with sea-smells
And a very old, a very plain homemade cry,
“Why didn’t we think of this before?”

In the intimate circles of the dictator,
At the desk at the end of a long room
where the imitation of God Almighty
sits running the works,
In the speech and look of the main star
and the lesser stars hovering in a
cluster and an orbit,
They know in the pressure of their personal
ego that this too shall pass away and be
lost in the long mass shadow of the ever-
living people
And down under the taboos and emblems, be-
hind pomp and ritual, posture and strut,
if the word justice is only one more word,
if the talk about justice is merely window-
dressing, if liberty is pushed too far in the

name of discipline, if the delicate lines
between personal freedom and requisite so-
cial performance are not every moment
a terrible load of care
There will be a payday and little bells lost in
the clang and boom of big bells

People are what they are
because they have come out of what was
Therefore they should bow down before what was
and take it and say it's good—or should they?

The advocates and exemplars of pride and gluttony
are forgotten or recalled with loathing
The mouthpieces of dumb misery are remembered
for the bitter silences they broke with crying

“Look, see this!
if it is alive or only half-alive
what name does it go by,
why is it what it is
and how long shall it be?”

Who can fight against the future?
What is the decree of tomorrow?
Haven't the people gone on and on
always taking more of their own?
How can the orders of the day
be against the people in this time?
What can stop them from taking
more and more of their own?

72

WHAT IS a judge? A judge is a seated torso and head sworn before God
never to sell justice nor play favorites while he umpires the disputes
brought before him

When you take the cigar out of your face and the fedora off your head in
the presence of the court, you do it because it is required from those
who are supposed to know they have come into a room where burns
the white light of that priceless abstraction named justice

What is a judge? The perfect judge is austere, impersonal, impartial, marking the line of right or wrong by a hairsbreadth
Before him, bow humbly, bow low, be a pilgrim, light a candle
For he is a *rara avis*, a rare bird, a white blackbird, a snowwhite crow

What is a judge? A featherless human biped having bowels, glands, bladders, and intricate blood vessels of the brain,
One more frail mortal, one more candle a sudden change of wind might blow out as any common candle blows out in a wind change
So that never again does he sit in his black robes of solemn import before a crowded courtroom saying two-years ten-years twenty-years life for you or "hanged by the neck till you are dead dead dead"

What is a judge? One may be the owner of himself coming to his decisions often in a blur of hesitations knowing by what snarled courses and ropes of reason justice operates, with reservations, in twilight zones

What is a judge? Another owns no more than the little finger of himself, others owning him, others having placed him where he is, others telling him what they want and getting it, others referring to him as "our judge" as though he is measured and weighed beforehand the same as a stockyard's hog, others holding him to decisions evasive of right or wrong, others writing his decisions for him, the atmosphere hushed and guarded, the atmosphere having a faint stockyard's perfume

What is a judge? Sometimes a mind giving one side the decision and the other side a lot of language and sympathy, sometimes washing his hands and rolling a pair of bones and leaving equity to a pair of galloping ivories

What is a judge? A man picked for a job by politicians with an eye sometimes on justice for the public, equal rights to all persons entering—or again with an eye on lucrative favors and special accommodations—a man having bowels, glands, bladders, and intricate blood vessels of the brain

Take that cigar out of your face Take that hat off your head
And why? why? Because here we are sworn never to sell justice and here burns the white light of that priceless abstraction named justice

What is a judge?
He is a man
Yes, after all, and no matter what,

and beyond all procedures and investitures,
 a judge is nothing more nor less than a man—
 one man having his one-man path, his one-
 man circle and orbit among other men
 each of whom is one man

Therefore should any judge open his mouth
 and speak as though his words have an
 added light and weight beyond the speech
 of one man?

Of what is he the mouthpiece when he speaks?
 Of any ideas or passions other than those gathered and met in the mesh of his own personality? Can his words be measured forth in so special a realm of exact justice instructed by tradition, that they do not relate to the living transitory blood of his vitals and brain, the blood so soon to cool in evidence of his mortal kinship with all other men?

73

IN the light of the cold glimmer of what everybody knows, why should the owners of the judges speak of respect for the law and the sanctity of the Constitution when they know so well how justice has been taken for a ride and thrown gagged and beaten into a ditch?

Why is it now a saying of the people, "You can't convict a million dollars"?

Why is the bribe-taker convicted so often and the bribe-giver so seldom?

Why does a hoary proverb live on its allegation that the nets of the law gather the petty thieves and let the big ones get away? what does this mean in the homes of the poor? how does it connect with crime and the poor?

Why should the propertyless depositors of wrecked banks be saying, "Wreck a bank from the outside and you get twenty years, wreck it from the inside and all you have to do is start another bank"?

What do the people say in their homes, in their churches, in their gathering places over coffee-and-doughnuts beer-and-pretzels? and how does the talk run about millionaire robbers, malefactors of great wealth, sitting easy with their loot while

One-two-three, five-six-seven every day the police seize and the courts order
to jail
this skulker who stole a bottle of milk,
this shadow who ran off with a loaf of bread,
this wanderer who purloined a baby sweater
in a basement salesroom—

And the case is dismissed of the railroad yard plain-clothes detective who
repeatedly called "Stop!" to a boy running with a sack of coal and
the boy not stopping the dick let him have it "It was dark and I
couldn't see him clear and I aimed at his legs My intention was to
stop him running I didn't mean for the bullet to go as high on him
as it did"

Thieves? Yes Little thieves? Yes And they get it where the chicken gets
the ax? Yes And the big shots are something else? Yes And you can't
convict a million dollars? Not unless Tuesday is Saturday, neighbor

What is a jury? Twelve men picked by chance and a couple of lawyers,
twelve men good and true or not-so-good, six of one and a half dozen
of the other

A jury? A bundle of twelve fagots, a dozen human sticks light and dark
with loves and hates, Protestant, Catholic, Jew, free-thinker, merchant,
farmer, workingman, thief, wets and dries, union and scab, savers and
spenders, tightwads and crapshooters, locked in a room to come out
saying Yes in one voice, No in one voice, or else, "Don't ask us what
is justice, we agree to disagree," all in one voice

A jury? Twelve names out of a hat Twelve picked blindfolded from a city
directory or a polling list The next twelve crossing Main Street, two
blocks from the post office Odd Fellows, Masons, Knights of Colum-
bus, deacons, poker-players, Democrats, Republicans, Independents,
Ku Klux and Anti-Ku Klux, ball fans, chippie chasers, teetotalers, con-
verts and backsliders

Now you got a jury Add one judge Add a few lawyers Add newspapers,
town gossip, "what everybody says" Add witnesses and evidence Add
it all The jury verdict is guilty not-guilty or agree-to-disagree

"Do you solemnly swear before the ever-
living God that the testimony you
are about to give in this cause shall
be the truth, the whole truth, and
nothing but the truth?"

"No, I don't I can tell you what I saw
and what I heard and I'll swear to
that by the everliving God but the
more I study about it the more sure
I am that nobody but the everliving
God knows the whole truth and if
you summoned Chnst as a witness in
this case what He would tell you
would burn your insides with the
pity and the mystery of it"

74

WHAT other oaths are wanted now?
You can never make moon poems
for people who never see the moon
Your moon poems are aimed
at people who look at the moon
and say, "Hello moon, good old moon,
"I knew you wouldn't forget me,
"Throw me a kiss, moon,
"I'll be seeing you, moon"
And the sun? what of the sun?
Can you make a sun poem
For those having soot on the window-sill?
When smoke and smudge and building walls
Stand between them and the sun
How can they get to know the sun
And how would they know a sun poem if they
Met one coming straight at them?
What use for them to hold a hand up against
the sun for the sake of seeing a silhouette
of the blue frame of the handbones?
In the slums overshadowed by smokestacks,
In the tomato cans in the window-sills
The geraniums have a low weeping song,
"Not yet have we known the sun,
not yet have we known the sun,"
Modulated with a hoping song,
"Some day we shall meet the sun

“And gather pieces of the sun into ourselves
“And be no longer stunted,
no longer runts of the slums”
And babies? what of the babies?
Can you make baby poems
For those who love special babies
clean antiseptic babies?
what of those Red Indian babies
fresh from the birthing-crotch?
For each of them the mystery-man raised
his right hand toward the sky and called
“Hey you sun moon stars
and you winds clouds rain mist,
“Listen to me! listen!
“The news is another baby belonging
has come to this earth of ours
“Make its path smooth so it can reach
the top of the first hill
and the second hill
“And hey you valleys rivers lakes trees grasses
you make its path smooth so it can reach
the top of the third hill
“And listen you birds of the air,
you animals of the tall timbers,
you bugs and creepers,
you too listen!
“All you of sky earth and air, I ask you, beg you
“Pass this baby on till it climbs up over
and beyond the fourth hill
“From then on this child will be strong enough
“To travel on its own and see what is beyond
those four hills!”

75

HUNGER and only hunger changes worlds?
The dictate of the belly
that gnawing under the navel,
this alone is the builder and the pathfinder
sending man into danger and fire
and death by struggle?

Yes and no, no and yes
The strong win against the weak
The strong lose against the stronger
And across the bitter years and the howling winters
the deathless dream will be the stronger,
the dream of equity will win
There are shadows and bones shot with lights
too strong to be lost
Can the wilderness be put behind?
Shall man always go on dog-eat-dog?
Who says so?
The stronger?
And who is the stronger?
And how long shall the stronger hold on
as the stronger?
What will tomorrow write?
"Of the people by the people for the people?"
What mockers ever wrung a crop from a waiting soil
Or when did cold logic bring forth a child?
"What use is it?" they asked a kite-flying sky gazer
And he wished in return to know, "What use is a baby?"
The dreaming scholars who quested the useless,
who wanted to know merely for the sake of knowing,
they sought and harnessed electrodynamic volts
becoming in time thirty billion horses in one country
hauling with thirty-billion-horse-power
and this is an early glimpse, a dim beginning,
the first hill of a series of hills.

What comes after the spectrum?
With what will the test-tubes be shaken tomorrow?
For what will the acetylene torch and pneumatic chisel be scrapped?
What will the international partnerships of the world laboratories track
down next, what new fuels, amalgams, alloys, seeds, cross-breeds, un-
foreseen short cuts to power?
Whose guess is better than anybody else's on whether the breed
of fire-bringers is run out, whether light rays, death rays, laugh rays,
are now for us only in a dim beginning?
Across the bitter years and the howling winters
the deathless dream will be the stronger
the dream of equity will win

76

THE record is a scroll of many indecipherable scrawls,
telling the pay of the people for commencing action
toward redress of wrongs too heavy
to be longer borne

“No strike is ever lost” an old cry
heard before the strike begins and heard long after, and
“No strike is ever lost” either a thought or an instinct
equivalent to “Give me liberty or give me death”

On the horizon a cloud no larger than
a man’s hand rolls larger and darker when masses of people
begin saying, “Any kind of death is better than this kind
of life”

The machine world of the insects
individual spiders engineering exploits
interwoven colonies of bees and ants
clouds of grasshopper destroyers
—they carry lessons and warnings
they do what they must
they are beyond argument

The flowing of the stream clears it of pollution
The refuse of humanity, the offscourings, the encumberings,
They are who?
They are those who have forgotten work and the price
At which life goes on
They live in shambles overly foul and in mansions overly
Swept and garnished
The flowing of the stream clears it of pollution

77

THE bottom of the sea accommodates mountain ranges
This is how deep the sea is
And the toss and drip of the mystery of the people
And the sting of sea-drip
In the long catacombs of moss fish linger and move

Hearing the cries of dolphins while they too wander
This is the depot of lost and unreclaimed baggage,
Colosseums of dead men's bones and the trunks of the
dead men each with a lock of hair, a ringlet of
somebody's hair in a locket, and a pack of love
letters and a deck of cards and a testament and
leather straps and brass buckles and brass locks
holding their fasteners on the trunks

78

WHAT did Hiamovi, the red man, Chief of
the Cheyennes, have?
To a great chief at Washington and to a
chief of peoples across the waters,
Hiamovi spoke
"There are birds of many colors—red, blue,
green, yellow,
Yet it is all one bird
There are horses of many colors—brown,
black, yellow, white,
Yet it is all one horse
So cattle, so all living things, animals,
flowers, trees
So men in this land, where once were only
Indians, are now men of many colors—
white, black, yellow, red
Yet all one people
That this should come to pass was in the
heart of the Great Mystery
It is right thus—and everywhere there
shall be peace"
Thus Hiamovi, out of a tarnished and weather-
worn heart of old gold, out of a living
dawn gold

What is the float of life that goes by us
in certain moods of autumn smoke
when tall trees seem in the possession of phantoms
carrying a scheme of haze

inevitably past changing sunsets
into a moist moonlight
and beyond into a baffling moonset
on a mist horizon?
These devices are made of what color and air?
And how far and in how does man make them himself?
 What is this pool of reverie
 this blur of contemplation
 wherein man is brother to mud and gold
 to bug and bird
 to behemoths and constellations?

In the evening twilight in the skyscraper office
and the hoom hoom of a big steamboat docking
and the auto horns and the corner newsboys
only half heard as far up as sixteen floors
the doctor meditated and spoke "The rich come afraid to die, afraid
to have their throats looked into, their intestines prodded It hurts
Their power of resistance is gone They can't stand pain Things go
wrong, they come into my office and ask what is the matter I have
to be careful how I say, 'You are growing old, that is all, everybody
grows old, we all have to die' That scares them They don't want to
grow old They tell me I must find a way to keep them from growing
old They don't want to die They tell me they will pay me to find
a way so they won't have to die" Thus in the evening twilight, in
the hoom hoom and the auto horns and the corner newsboys only
half heard up sixteen floors

And he went on

"I was in a hospital the other day A man blind thirty-five years could see
again We walked out together And up the street he saw a horse
He asked, 'What is that?' I said, 'It's a horse—didn't you ever see a
horse before?' He answered, 'No, this is the first time I ever saw a
horse' "

Thus in the evening twilight
in the hoom hoom

And the doctor went on "A few weeks ago came a woman saying she
had been to a great symphony concert, going out to walk miles, still
hearing the grand crashes of that music, walking home on air, telling
me, 'I went to bed and wept for three weeks—what is the matter

with me?' I had to tell her, 'Only a slight matter You will be well again when you learn to listen to the ticking of the clock' "

To a lawyer who came saying he had undertaken more financial reorganizations than there was time for and his nerves were shot the doctor talked long about worry, gave the lawyer a box and 100 black beans "Each morning you drop a bean in the box and say, 'Worry is in the bean and the bean is in the box' "

In the hoom hoom of the big steamboat docking the doctor said, "Silence is the great gratitude when bad music ends"

79

In paper sacks the customers carry away millions of tons of goods daily except Sunday

And having used what they carry away in paper sacks they go back daily except Sunday for more millions of tons of useable goods transferred in paper sacks

And the trade experts look on and call it consumption while the people carrying the paper sacks have a way of alleging, "We have to eat, don't we?"

And once there was a man who considered how he might make a paper sack song and invent a paper sack dance In the days of his youth he had worked in the pulp Joined with other men and machines he had taken logs and cooked a mash and dried and flattened it out and kept flattening it till it was thin as paper and it was paper And his sister in another mill had watched a machine and tended it, daily except Sunday it spat forth its stint of millions of paper sacks

And the brother and sister say to each other now, "We have made so many millions of paper sacks we know exactly the feelings and ideas of any one paper sack One paper sack thinks just what another paper sack thinks And now when our jobs are gone because bigger and better machines do what we used to do my sister and I say to each other Hello, old paper sack And we talk about how we are a couple of paper sacks thrown away and no longer wanted because there is no answer to the question Why are paper sacks so cheap?

"And we talk on and we decide we are something more than paper sacks We have a right to live and a right to work and we have a right to say life ought to be good and life is more than paper sacks And we will go anywhere and listen to any

organizers and agitators who come to us saying "We speak
to you as people and not as paper sacks"

In Gloversville, New York, a woman daylong made mittens and the faster
she made the mittens the more the wages coming in for her and her
children

And her hands became like mittens she said,

And in the winter when she looked out one night

Where the moon lighted a couple of evergreen trees

"My God! I look at evergreens in the moonlight

and what are they? A pair of mittens

And what am I myself? Just a mitten

Only one more mitten, that's all

My God! if I live a little longer in that mitten factory the whole world
will be just a lot of mittens to me

And at last I will be buried in a mitten and on my grave they will put up
a mitten as a sign one more mitten is gone"

This was why she listened to the organizer of the glove and mitten work-
ers' union, maybe the union could do something

She would fight in the union ranks and see if somehow they could save
her from seeing two evergreens at night in the moon as just another
pair of mitts

80

DEEP in the dusty chattels of the tombs,

Laden with luggage handed them

By departing ghosts saying, "It's yours, all yours,"

They give their ghost imprint to the time they live in

They are to the people what they are to the sea,

To the harvest moon, to the living grassroots,

To the tides that wash them away babbling to some caretaker, "What
time is it? where are we?"

And time, since you ask, time is the story-teller you can't shut up, he goes
on

The king, like many a king, was a little coccoo, and hung up a challenge
Whoever would tell him a story so long that he couldn't stand any
more of it would marry his princess daughter Otherwise the story-
teller's neck would be blemished with a gleaming ax-blade The story-
teller began on how grain elevators bulging with corn ran for miles
while the locusts spread out many more miles and there was only

one point of entry and egress for the crawling hordes of slithering locusts, only one place for a locust to go in and out And one locust went in and brought out a grain of corn and another locust went in and brought out another grain of corn And another locust went in and brought out another grain of corn And another locust went in and brought out another grain of corn And so on and so on till the king saw what he had let himself in for and speaking in the royal tone customary to kings he told the story-teller, "You win, the girl is yours" And this was back in the old days when kings were kings and wore crowns and had crown jewels

Time? The story-teller you can't shut up, he goes on

"Time is blind, man stupid"

Thus one of the cynics

"Time is relentless, man shrewd"

Thus one of the hopefuls

Time passes, man laughs at it

The sun-dial was one laugh

The wrist-watch is another

"Time? I can't stop it but I
can measure it"

81

CHICAGO seems all fox and swine,
Dreams interfused with smut, dung, hunger
Yet Chicago is not all belly and mouth and
overwrought sex and lies and greed
and snobs

Chicago has something over and beyond
Sometime the seeds and cross-fertilizations
now moving in Chicago may inaugurate
a crossroads of great gladness

The same goes for Omaha and points west,
for Buffalo and points east

Out of the shopping crowds at State and Madison, hot with bundles and
bargains,

A humpty-dumpty runt of a man dived at high noon into a forest of rub-
bernecks craning at a skywriting plane telling you what cigarette to
smoke next, what cigarette to buy,

And he came up to say there was too much quick thinking and he would offer a little slow thinking

"From the museum mummies I came to these ghosts swirling around State and Madison, Forty-second and Fifth Avenue, and about all I learned was this, you can write it on a thumbnail

"There is a dead past and a blank future and the same humanity is in each and it's all ham and eggs, dog eat dog, the toughest guts have their way, and they kill and kill to see who'll get the most marbles, the most cocoanuts, the most little embossed pieces of paper"

And then he went on, wiping his chin with four fingers and a thumb, screwing his eyes to a thin slit, and correcting himself

"I take that back Write it off as a loss If the big arch of the sky were paper and the violet depths of the sea were ink, I could never live long enough to write the dreams of man and the dynamic drive of those dreams

"Who and what is man? He is Atlas and Thor and Yankee Doodle, an eagle, a lion, a rooster, a bear that walks like a man, an elephant, a moon-face, David and Goliath, Paul Bunyan and the Flying Dutchman, Shakespeare, Lincoln and Christ, the Equator and the Arctic Poles, holding in one hand the Bank of England and the Roman Catholic Church, in the other the Red Army and the Standard Oil Company, holding in easy reach the dogs of war and the doves of peace, the tigers of wrath and the horses of instruction

"Let me sell you my dreams Take these dreams for whatever you want to pay me You shall never be tired till the sea is tired You shall never go weary till the land and the wind go weary You will be hard as nails, soft as blue fog

"Man is born with rainbows in his heart and you'll never read him unless you consider rainbows He is a trouble shooter with big promises He trades the Oklahoma roan mustang for a tub in the sky with wings falling falling in Alaska Hard as a rock his head is an egg and ponders ponders He is a phantasmagoria of crimson dawns and what it takes to build his dreams."

So the finish He ceased from wiping his chin with four fingers and a thumb, ceased from screwing his eyes to a thin slit, ceased correcting himself.

Then he vanished In a wreath of blue smoke from a panatella seegar he was gone, a scholar, a clown, and a dreambook seller who had said enough for one day

Turning a corner he talked to himself about the dust of the knuckles of

his great-grandfathers, how they once were hard as nails and could pick a vest-button with a bullet, and how his own little knuckles sometime would shiver into fine dust and how he wanted snowdrifts piled over him and the inscription HERE NO ONE LIES BURIED

82

I PLEDGE my allegiance,
say the munitions makers and the international bankers,
I pledge my allegiance to this flag, that flag,
any flag at all, of any country anywhere
paying its bills and meeting interest on loans,
one and indivisible,
coming through with cash in payment as stipulated
with liberty and justice for all,
say the munitions makers and the international bankers

“Your million dollars, if you will pardon me,”
said a polite shrimp, “came one of three
ways First, if you will pardon me, you
took it somehow as profits within the law
belonging to you, unless, second, you have
it as a gift or bequest handed to you with-
out your working for it, or unless, if you
will pardon me, third and last, you took
it, outside the law and yet beyond the
reach of the law, as belonging to you
rather than whoever had it before you
got it from them ”

What good is rain on a hard and sour soil?
Why put a driller and seeder
where the top soil is blown away?
Why put your headlights on in bright noon?
Why do favors where you know you get no thanks?

Some have their finger-nails pinked
a regular shade, according to custom
Some, wearing pearls, have their finger-nails
tinted, enameled and polished

to match the precise color of their pearls
 Those with oyster pearls shade to a crystal,
 others are touched with desert gray, sea green
 And cosmetics volume last year was over a billion

83

Who can make a poem of the depths of weariness
 bringing meaning to those never in the depths?
 Those who order what they please
 when they choose to have it—
 can they understand the many down under
 who come home to their wives and children at night
 and night after night as yet too brave and unbroken
 to say, "I ache all over"?
 How can a poem deal with production cost
 and leave out definite misery paying
 a permanent price in shattered health and early old age?
 When will the efficiency engineers and the poets
 get together on a program?
 Will that be a cold day? will that be a special hour?
 Will somebody be cocoo then?
 And if so, who?
 And what does the Christian Bible say?
 And the Mohammedan Koran and Confucius and the Shintoists
 and the Encyclicals of the Popes?
 Will somebody be cocoo then?
 And if so, who??"

84

In the chain store or the independent it is the people meeting the people
 "Would you like to be waited on? Could I wait on you? Could I be
 of assistance? Is there something you would like? Is there something
 for you? Could I help you? Anything I can help you to? What will
 yours be? What can I get for you? What would you like? Is there
 something?"

The rodeo hoss wrangler, the airplane stunter,
 the living cannonball shot from a gun,
 the animal tamer amid paws and fangs—

they use up their luck ahead of time,
they bet their necks and earn a living
they play fair with their seen galleries
the same as lone hunters and explorers
aim to please unseen acres of fine faces,
aim to tell about it later maybe
if a public cares to hear

In this corner the spotlighted challenger,
in this corner the world's heavyweight champ
along with camera boys grinding,
lads at the mikes giving round by round,
they aim to please,
to put it over big
for the fish on the spot,
for the many more fish beyond,
one sports writer quizzing another,
"How many of the fish are here?"
"What's your guess?"

The world series pitcher pets his arm,
prays he won't get a glass arm
he too strives to please
he would like to put smoke on the ball
and throw a hitless game
when the big-boy home-run hitter
has an off day and fans the air,
at the umpire's cry "three strikes"
he may hear from the bleachers,
"Take the big bum out"

One movie star arches her eyebrows
and refers to "my public"
One soda-jerker arches his eyebrows,
curves malt-milk from shaker to glass
and speaks of "my public"
The dance marathon winning couple
bow sleepy thanks to their public
The fire department ladder truck driver
sees his public at a standstill
on the sidewalk curbs.

The going-going-gone jewelry auctioneer
plays to another public
And at every street intersection
these publics intersect

Ringmasters in top hats, clowns on mules,
circus riders in spangles,
little ladies doing somersaults on horses,
acrobat families in pink tights
sliding their own human toboggans—
the peanut, popcorn, and red lemonade sellers
they feel their crowds and read crowd moods

“I know why I lost my crowd tonight,”
said a flame of an actor
“I never can do anything with them
unless I love them ”

The breezes of surface change blow lightly
The people take what comes, hold on, let go
The high wheel bicycle was a whiz
Eskimo pie raked in a lot of jack
The tom thumb golf courses had a run
Yo yo charmed till yo yo checked out
The tree sitters climbed up, came down
Sideburns, galways, handlebar mustaches, full beards,
they fitted away on winds whistling,
“Where are the snows of yesteryear?”
meaning snow and stage-snow, the phony and the real
gone to the second-hand bins, the rummage sales,
the Salvation Army wagons

Stronger winds blow slow
Trial balloons are sent up
The public says yes, says no
The whim of the public rides
A hoarse cry carves events

The platoon of police in uniform,
the drum-major with his baton
and a gold ball high in the air,

The silver cornet band, the fife-and-drum corps,
the Knights of Pythias in plume and gilt braid,
the speakers of the day with mounted escorts,
the fire department, the Odd Fellows, the Woodmen,
the civilian cohorts following the local militia,
American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars,
they march between sidewalks
heavy with a human heave,
heavy with vox populi

"Me too, count me in
I want to belong
I do what's regular
I'll sign up
A trial package can't hurt me
Here's my name and dues
I'll try anything once"

This is the tune of today's razzle-dazzle
Tomorrow the tune is never quite the same
Tomorrow's children have it *their* own way

When the yes-men no longer yes
or the no-men shift their no
anything is in the cards

Ask the public relations counsel
He is a shortstop and a scavenger
smooth as a big league umpire
cool as a veteran horse race jockey
cool as a cube of cucumber on ice
He will tell you there is a public
and this public has many relations
and you can't have too much counsel
when you're trying to handle it

Our ghost writers will ghost for you
they write it, you hand it out
or you speak the speech written for you
and nobody knows but the ghost
and the ghost is paid
for helping you with your public

The cheer leader struts his stuff,
wigwags the swaying grand stand,
throws himself into alphabetical shapes
trying to orchestrate his crowd
the fads and fashions innovators,
the halitosis and body odor frighteners,
the skin and complexion fixers,
the cigarette ads lying about relative values,
the nazi imitators, the fascist imitators,
the ku klux klan and the konklave's wizard,
the makers of regalia, insignia, masks,
hoods, hats, nightshirts, skull-and-crossbones,
the spellbinder calling on all true patriots,
the soapboxer pleading for the proletariat,
the out-of-works marching marching
with demands and banners, "why? why?"
the strike leader telling why the men walked out,
the million-dollar-national-sales-campaign director,
the headache copy writer groping for one new idea,
the drive organizers planning their hoorah,
the neighborhood captains of tens and twenties,
the best-seller authors, the by-line correspondents,
the President at the White House microphone,
the Senators, Congressmen, spokesmen, at microphones—
Each and all have a target.

Each one aims for the ping ping
the bling bling of a sharpshooter

Here is a moving colossal show,
a vast dazzling aggregation of stars and hams
selling things, selling ideas, selling farths,
selling air, slogans, passions, selling history

The target is who and what?

The people, yes—
sold and sold again
for losses and regrets,
for gains, for slow advances,
for a dignity of deepening roots

85

ONE memorial stone reads
"We, near whose bones you stand, were Iroquois
The wide land which is now yours, was ours
Friendly hands have given us back enough for a tomb"

Breeds run out
and shining names
no longer shine
Tribes, clans, nations, have their hour,
Hang up their records and leave
Yet who could chisel on a gravestone
"Here lies John Doe," or,
"Here rest the mortal remains of Richard Roe"
And then step back and read the legend and say,
"Can this be so when I myself am John Doe,
when I myself am Richard Roe"?

pack up your bundle now and go
be a seeker among voices and faces
on main street in a bus station at a union depot
this generation of eaters sleepers lovers toilers
flowing out of the last one now buried
flowing into the next one now unborn
short of cash and wondering where to? what next?
jobs bosses paydays want-ads groceries soap
board and clothes and a corner to sleep in
just enough to get by
when its lamplighting time in the valley
where is my wandering boy tonight
in the beautiful isle of somewhere
the latest extra and another ax murder
he's forgotten by the girl he can't forget
she lives in a mansion of aching hearts
tickets? where to? round trip or one way?
room rent coffee and doughnuts maybe a movie
suit-cases packsacks bandanas
names saved and kept careful

you mustn't lose the address
 and what'll be your telephone number?
 give me something to remember you by
 be my easy rider
 kiss me once before you go a long one
 flash eyes testaments in a rush
 underhums of plain love with rye bread sandwiches
 and grief and laughter where to? what next?

86

THE people, yes, the people,
 Until the people are taken care of one way or another,
 Until the people are solved somehow for the day and hour,
 Until then one hears "Yes but the people what about the people?"
 Sometimes as though the people is a child to be pleased or fed
 Or again a hoodlum you have to be tough with
 And seldom as though the people is a caldron and a reservoir
 Of the human reserves that shape history,
 The river of welcome wherein the broken First Families fade,
 The great pool wherein wornout breeds and clans drop for restorative
 silence

Fire, chaos, shadows,
 Events trickling from a thin line of flame
 On into cries and combustions never expected
 The people have the element of surprise
 Where are the kings today?
 What has become of their solid and fastened thrones?
 Who are the temporary puppets holding sway while anything, "God
 only knows what," waits around a corner, sits in the shadows and
 holds an ax, waiting for the appointed hour?

"The czar has eight million men with guns and bayonets
 Nothing can happen to the czar
 The czar is the voice of God and shall live forever
 Turn and look at the forest of steel and cannon
 Where the czar is guarded by eight million soldiers
 Nothing can happen to the czar"
 They said that for years and in the summer of 1914

In the Year of Our Lord Nineteen Hundred and Fourteen
As a portent and an assurance they said with owl faces
 "Nothing can happen to the czar"
Yet the czar and his bodyguard of eight million vanished
And the czar stood in a cellar before a little firing squad
And the command of fire was given
And the czar stepped into regions of mist and ice
The czar travelled into an ethereal uncharted siberia
While two kaisers also vanished from thrones
Ancient and established in blood and iron—
Two kaisers backed by ten million bayonets
Had their crowns in a gutter, their palaces mobbed
 In fire, chaos, shadows,
In hurricanes beyond foretelling of probabilities,
In the shove and whirl of unforeseen combustions
 The people, yes, the people,
Move eternally in the elements of surprise,
Changing from hammer to bayonet and back to hammer,
The hallelujah chorus forever shifting its star soloists

87

THE people learn, unlearn, learn,
a builder, a wrecker, a builder again,
a juggler of shifting puppets
 In so few eyeblinks
 In transition lightning streaks,
the people project midgets into giants,
the people shrink titans into dwarfs

Faiths blow on the winds
and become shibboleths
and deep growths
 with men ready to die
for a living word on the tongue,
for a light alive in the bones,
for dreams fluttering in the wrists

For liberty and authority they die
though one is fire and the other water

and the balances of freedom and discipline
are a moving target with changing decoys

Revolt and terror pay a price
Order and law have a cost
What is this double use of fire and water?
Where are the rulers who know this riddle?
On the fingers of one hand you can number them
How often has a governor of the people first
learned to govern himself?

The free man willing to pay and struggle and die
for the freedom for himself and others
Knowing how far to subject himself to discipline
and obedience for the sake of an ordered so-
ciety free from tyrants, exploiters and
legalized frauds—

This free man is a rare bird and when you meet
him take a good look at him and try
to figure him out because
Some day when the United States of the Earth
gets going and runs smooth and pretty there
will be more of him than we have now

88

THE response of wild birds
to a home on the way,
a stopping place of rest,
this and the wish of a child
to eat the moon
as a golden ginger cookie—
this is in the songs of the people

The clods of the earth hold place
close to the whir of yellow hummingbird wings
and they divide into those hard of hearing
and those whose ears pick off
a smooth hush with a little wind whimper across it
and then again only the smooth hush

What are these dialects deep under the bones
whereby the people of ages and races far apart
reach out and say the same clay is in all,
bringing out men whose eyes
search the earth and see no aliens anywhere,
pronouncing across the barriers the peculiar word
"Brother"?

Washing his shirt in a jungle near Omaha,
warming his java under a C B & Q bridge,
a hobo mumbled to himself a mumbling poem
and said it was an outline of history
and you could take it or leave it,
you could ride the rods or hunt an empty
and he would mumble
 "A hammering, a neverending hammering goes on
 Suns and moons by platoons batter down
 the shovels and the clamps
 of other suns and moons
 "By platoons always by platoons under a hammering,
 the cries of the tongs go kling klong
 to the bong bong of the hammers"

The bulls took him in
The bulls gathered him
In the lockup he thought it over
In the cooler he was not so hot,
They said, and further they said,
He was nuts, he was dopey from white mule
 Yet he kept on with his mumbling
 of the shovels and the clamps,
 of the tongs going kling klong
 and the bong bong of the hammers,
 of history and its awful anvils

 "Listen," he cried,
 "Kling klong go the mighty hammers,
 kling klong on a mighty anvil,
 steel on steel they clash and weld,
 how long can you last? how long?"

goes the clamor of the hammer and the anvil,
how long? goes the steel kling klong
the gunmetal blue gives it and takes it
in the fire and the pounding
the hard old answer goes
 let the works go on
I will last a long time yet a long time"

A fly-by-night house, a shanty,
a ramshackle hut of tarpaper, tin cans,
body by fisher, frames from flivvers,
a shelter from rain and wind,
the home of a homeseeker having an alibi,
why did two hungers move across his face?
 One when do we eat?
 The other What is worth looking at?
 what is worth listening to?
 why do we live?
 when is a homeseeker
 just one more trespasser?
 and what is worth dying for?

89

MARSHALL FIELD THE FIRST was spick and span while alive
and wishing to be well kept and properly groomed
in the long afterward
he stipulated in a clause of his will
a fund of \$25,000 be set aside and its income be devoted
to the upkeep of his tomb

 The country editor of Stoughton, Wisconsin,
 was not so careful, less spick and span
He left orders to the typesetters and they obeyed him.
 His obituary read "Charlie Cross is dead"
 And that was all

John Eastman died leaving the Chicago Journal to four men,
to four old friends who knew how to get out the paper
And to make sure the obseques would be correct and decent
 he instructed in his last will and testament
 "Let no words of praise be spoken at my funeral."

What about that Chinese poet
traveling on a cart
with a jug of wine,
a shovel and a grave-digger?
Each morning as they started
he told the grave-digger
"Bury me when I am dead—
anywhere, anytime "
He was afraid of a fancy funeral
What did he have?
He would be covered down like any coolie
"anywhere, anytime," no music, no flowers

What about that radio operator in the North Atlantic
on a stormlashed sinking Scandinavian ship
laughing the wireless message
'God pity the poor sailors on a night like this'
adding word they were heading for Davy Jones' locker
and adding further
"This is no night to be out without an umbrella!"
What about him?
And what did he have?
He went to a sea-tomb laughing an epitaph
"This is no night to be out without an umbrella "

Who was that professor at the University of Wisconsin working out a
butter-fat milk tester
Good for a million dollars if he wanted a patent with sales and royalties
And he whistled softly and in dulcet tone What in God's name do I
want with a million dollars?
Whistling as though instead of his owning the million it would own him

Who was that South Dakota Norwegian who
went to Siberia and brought back
Wheat grains pushing the North American wheat
area hundreds of miles northward?
He could have had a million dollars and took
instead a million thanks

Why did the two high wizards of applied
electrodynamics say

All they wanted was board and clothes and time
to think things over?

Why did they go along so careless about dollars,
so forgetful about millions,

Letting others organize and gather the shekels
and progress from boom to crash to boom
to crash?

Why is the Schenectady hunchback dwarf one
of the saints in shirtsleeves?

And why did the deaf mechanic in Orange, New
Jersey, forget to eat unless his wife called
him,

And why did he die saying What is electricity?
we don't know What is heat? we don't know
We are beginners "Look at the moon—it
winks at the ignorance of the world "

What of the Wright boys in Dayton? Just around the corner they had
a shop and did a bicycle business—and they wanted to fly for the
sake of flying

They were Man the Seeker, Man on a Quest Money was their last
thought, their final absent-minded idea

They threw out a lot of old mistaken measurements and figured new ones
that stood up when they took off and held the air and steered a
course They proved "the faster you go the less power you need "

One of them died and was laid away under blossoms dropped from zoom-
ing planes The other lived on to meditate what is *attraction*? when
will we learn why things go when they go? what and where is the
power?

Why is raggedy Johnny Appleseed half-man half-myth? From old cider
mills he filled his sacks with apple-seeds and out of his plantings came
orchards in Ohio and Indiana "God ordained me a sower to sow that
others might reap " Why will they remember the earthly shadow of
Johnny with bronze figures tomorrow in Ohio and Indiana?

Was it true that Van Gogh cut off
one of his ears
and gave it to a daughter
of the streets,
to one who had pleased him?

And if he did what did he mean by it?
And who could guess what Van Gogh
had in mind if anything in particular?
In and out by thousands they went
to see the Van Gogh exhibit
of paintings touring America,
in and out by thousands
finding the color and line
of a plain strange personality,
something dear and rich
out of the umber of the earth
Somewhere in what he flung from his brush
was a missing ear
and why it might be missed
and a blunt gesture,
"What of it?"

Why did the St Louis Mirror editor name as his favorite Shakespeare
line "I myself am but indifferent honest"? and how did he mean it
when in an owl-car dawn, ending a long night of talk, he blurted to
a poet, "God damn it, I tell you there are no bad people"?

Who was the St Louis mathematician who figured it cost an average of
\$37,000 to kill each soldier killed in the World War?
He figured too on a way of offering, in case of war, \$1,000, one grand, to
every deserting soldier
Each army, the idea ran, would buy off the other before the war could
get started

Who was that Pittsburgh Scotchman terrorized by having a quarter bil-
lion dollars?
Why did he give it away before he died as though he could never take it
away with him?
Who was the Chicago Jew who threw millions of dollars into Negro
schools of the South?
Why did he once tell another Jew, "I'm ashamed to have so much
money"?

"There are no pockets in the shroud" may be carried farther
"The dead hold in their clenched hands only that which they have given
away"

Who was that Roman "I am a man and nothing on legs and human is
a stranger to me"?

He could have met the first Negro who sang "When you see me laugh-
ing I'm laughing to keep from crying"

Did he give them a high and roaring laughter when he had his throne
moved out into the sea,

When he sat in his sea-set throne and commanded the tide "Go back!
go back! it is I, King Knute who tell you so and I am putting you to
this test because a circle of my advisers have told me over and again
that I am beyond other plain people, I am made of no common clay
and what I say goes and even the ocean will obey me and do what
I say and therefore I give you the order to Go back! go back! and
don't dare bring your stink of seawrack and salt water even to the foot-
stool of this royal throne of mine"?

Did he give them a high and roaring laughter as the tide slowly and in-
evitably rose over his footstool, to his knees, to his navel, to his neck,
When he rose, plunged and swam ashore and told them to let the throne
be washed out to join the flotsam and jetsam of the immemorial sea?

Who was the young Nicodemus in Chicago so early in the twentieth cen-
tury falling heir to a million dollars and writing a pamphlet of public
inquiry titled The Confessions of a Drone and having one luminous
and quivering question to ask-

Why was this money wished on me merely because I was born where I
couldn't help being born so that I don't have to work while a lot of
people work for me and I can follow the races, yacht, play horse polo,
chase if I so choose any little international chippie that takes my eye,
eat nightingale tongues, buy sea islands or herds of elephants or
trained fleas, or go to Zanzibar, to Timbuctoo, to the mountains of
the moon, and never work an hour or a day and when I come back
I find a lot of people working for me because I was born where I
couldn't help being born?

90

THE big fish eat the little fish,
the little fish eat shrimps
and the shrimps eat mud

You don't know enough to come in when it rains
You don't know beans when the bag is open

You don't know enough to pound sand in a rat hole.
All I know is what I hear
All I know is what I read in the papers
All I know you can put in a thimble
All I know I keep forgetting

We have to eat, don't we?
You can't eat promises, can you?
You can't eat the Constitution, can you?
I can eat crow but I don't hanker after it
Don't quarrel with your bread and butter
Some curse the hand that feeds them
Many kiss the hands they wish to see cut off
You can't rob a naked man of his clothes
He that makes himself an ass, men will ride him
Stand like a good mule and you're soon harnessed

Be not rash with thy mouth
Praise no man before his death,
When pups bark old dogs go along doing whatever
it was they were doing
He who blackens others does not whiten himself
The camel has his plans, the camel driver his plans
The horse thinks one thing, he who saddles him another
Ask me no questions and I tell you no lies
The best witness is a written paper
Liars should have good memories
Some liars get monotonous
Hearsay is half lies
To say nothing is to say yes
Hold your tongue one second and
a bundle of trouble is held off
Be careful what you say or
you go out of the door
and meet yourself coming in
Hunger and cold deliver a man to his enemy
Hunger says to hell with the law
The empty belly instructs the tongue
Want changes men into wild animals
Unless you say eat the hungry belly can't
hear you

91

WHO were those editors picking the most
detestable word in the English language
and deciding the one word just a little
worse than any other you can think of
is "Exclusive"?

The doorbells were many and the approaches screened and the corners
hushed in the care of frozen-faced butlers and footmen in livery,
London trained, chauffeurs, cooks, maids, twenty-two when counted,
for personal service in the Lake Shore Drive apartments overlooking
one blue of water meeting another blue of skyline

And one young man yawned over his real estate and securities, his Chi-
cago and Manhattan skyscrapers, his silk mills in France, his woolen
mills in Scotland, his cotton mills north and south in the States,
yawned over the caretakers and trustees sober and dependable in cus-
tody of what had grown since he was a baby to whom accrued from
a dying father an estate beyond one hundred millions, one blue of
water meeting another blue of skyline then as now Across the dust
and roar of Halsted Street he rode one afternoon into the seething
jungles and slums of the West Side, to yawn and smile, "This is No
Man's Land to me," never to go back, to sense it as a dull and alien
rabble, a polyglot of panhandlers mooching pig-stickers, structural
ironworkers after a day with rivets and bolts lifting schooners of beer
to laugh, "Here every man is as good as the next one and for the
matter of that a little better"

To a Long Island Sound country mansion he fled and in a scarlet English
hunting coat shot pheasants by the hundreds with retainers loading
the guns for him and his guests, to Buckingham Palace he fitted, to
the African gold coast, to the Riviera, to Biarritz, to nowhere among
multiplied nothings, from wife to wife and tweedledum to tweedledee,
in car, yacht and plane fleeing from No Man's Land, with a personal
service staff of twenty-two when counted, and always from the Lake
Shore Drive one blue of water meeting another blue of skyline

And who are these others?

Why, they are the three tailors of Tooley Street, signing themselves, "We,
the people,"

Having an audacity easier to look at than three others, namely, one prime minister, one banker, one munitions maker, in the name of the people letting loose a war

These others, you may have read, are "the great unwashed," "the hoi polloi," they are indicated with gestures

"The rabble," "the peepul," "the mob with its herd instinct in its wild stampede," "the irresponsible ragtag and bobtail"—

Can they also be the multitude fed by a miracle on loaves and fishes, les misérables in a pit, in a policed abyss of want?

Was it this same miscellany heard the Sermon on the Mount, the Gettysburg Speech, the Armistice Day news when confetti dotted the window-sills and white paper blew in snowdrifts on the city streets? And in the Gettysburg speech was it written, "of the peepul, by the peepul, and for the peepul"?

When they gather the voices and prints from above what most often do they hear and read?

They are told to go north and south at once, for liberty, to go east and west at once, for liberty

The advice is pounded in their ears, "Go up, go down, stand where you are, for liberty"

In one ear comes the clamor, "You are damned if you do," in the other ear, "You are damned if you don't"

And when liberty is all washed up the dictators say

"You are the greatest people on earth and we shall shoot only as many of you as necessary."

Out of this mass are shaped

Armies, navies, work gangs, wrecking crews

Here are the roars to shake walls

and set roofs shuddering,

Hecklers ready with hoots, howls, boos, meeuw,

Bronx cheers, the razzberry, the bum's rush,

Straw hats by thousands thrown from the bleachers,

Pop bottles by hundreds aimed at an umpire,

The units of the bargain sale crush, the subway jam,

The office building emptying its rush hour stream,

The millions at radio sets for an earful,

The millions turning newspaper pages for an eyeful

This is the source and the headwater

Of tomorrow's Niagara of action, monotony, action,
rapids, plungers, whirlpool and mist
of the people and by the people,
a long street and a vast field of faces,
faces across an immeasurable mural,
faces shifting on an incalculable panel,
touched and dented with line and contrast,
potatoes winking at cherry blossoms,
roses here and ashes of roses there,
thornapple branches hung with redhaws,
hickory side by side with moss violets,
the mangelwurzer elbowing the orchid

Here is a huggermugger becoming
a cloud of witnesses, a juggernaut,
the Mississippi asking the peaks of the Rockies,
"How goes it?"
a hallelujah chorus forever changing its star soloists,
taking pyramid, pagoda and skyscraper in its stride,
having survival elements and gifts in perpetuity,
requiring neither funeral march, memorial nor epitaph
Why should the continuing generations
who replenish themselves in the everliving earth
need any tall symbol set up to be gazed at
as a sign they are gone, past, through,
when they are here yet,
so massively and chorally here yet
in a multitudinous trampling
of shoes and wheels, hands and tools, having heard
"The voice of the people is the voice of God,"
having heard, "Be ye comforted for your dreams shall come true on earth
by your own works,"
having heard, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you
free"

The wheel turns
The wheel comes to a standstill
The wheel waits
The wheel turns

“Something began me
and it had no beginning
something will end me
and it has no end ”

The people is a long shadow
trembling around the earth,
stepping out of fog gray into smoke red
and back from smoke red into fog gray
and lost on parallels and meridians
learning by shock and wrangling,
by heartbreak so often and loneliness so raw
the laugh comes at least half true,
“My heart was made to be broken ”

“Man will never write,”
they said before the alphabet came
and man at last began to write
“Man will never fly,”
they said before the planes and blimps
zoomed and purred in arcs
winding their circles around the globe

“Man will never make the United States of Europe
nor later yet the United States of the World,
“No, you are going too far when you talk about one
world flag for the great Family of Nations,”
they say that now

And man the stumbler and finder, goes on,
man the dreamer of deep dreams,
man the shaper and maker,
man the answerer

The first wheel maker saw a wheel, earned
in his head a wheel, and one day found his
hands shaping a wheel, the first wheel
The first wagon makers saw a wagon, joined
their hands and out of air, out of what
had lived in their minds, made the first
wagon
One by one man alone and man joined

has made things with his hands
beginning in the fog wisp of a dim imagining
resulting in a tool, a plan, a working model,
 bones joined to breath being alive
in wheels within wheels, ignition, power,
transmission, reciprocals, beyond man alone,
alive only with man joined

Where to? what next?

Man the toolmaker, tooluser,
son of the burning quests
fixed with roaming forearms,
hands attached to the forearms,
fingers put on those hands,
a thumb to face any finger—
hands cunning with knives, leather, wood,
 hands for twisting, weaving, shaping—
Man the flint grinder, iron and bronze welder,
 smoothing mud into hut walls,
 smoothing reinforced concrete into
 bridges, breakwaters, office buildings—
two hands projected into vast claws, giant hammers,
 into diggers, haulers, lifters
The clamps of the big steam shovel? man's two hands
the motor hurling man into high air? man's two hands
 the screws of his skulled head
 joining the screws of his hands,
pink convolutions transmitting to white knuckles
 waves, signals, buttons, sparks—
 man with hands for loving and strangling,
 man with the open palm of living handshakes,
man with the closed nails of the fist of combat—
 these hands of man—where to? what next?

92

THE breathing of the earth
may be heard along with
the music of the sea
in their joined belongings

Consider the ears of a donkey
and the varied languages entering them
Study the deep-sea squid
and see how he does only what he has to,
how the wild ducks of autumn
come flying in a shifting overhead scroll,
how rats earn a living and survive
and pass on their tough germ plasms
to children who can live where others die
Mink are spotlessly clean for special reasons
The face of a goat has profound contemplations
Only a fish can do the autobiography of a fish

93

AN aster, a farewell-summer flower, stays long in the last fall weeks,
Lingers in fence corners where others have shivered and departed
The whites have mentioned it as the last-rose-of-summer, the red man
saying, "It-brings-the-frost"
Late in the morning and only when sun-warmed does the flower-of-an-
hour, the good-night-at-noon, open a while and then close its blossoms
Even in the noon sun the scarlet pimpernel may shut its petals, as a storm
sign, earning its ancient name of wink-a-peep and sometimes called
the poor-man's-weather-glass
John-go-to-bed-at-noon is the goat's beard plant shutting itself at twelve
o'clock and showing again only when the next day's sun is out.
One looped vine of the hop-growers is a kiss-me-quick and more than one
red flower blooming in rock corners is a love-lies-bleeding or a look-
up-and-kiss-me

The saskatoon is a shadblow looming white in the spring weeks when the
shad are up the rivers and spawning,
And hanging its branches with the June berry, the Indian cherry, it is still
the saskatoon fed by the melted snows of chinooks

The toadflax, the ox-eye daisy, the pussy willow, rabbit bells, buffalo
clover, swamp candles and wafer ash,
These with the windrose and the rockrose, lady slippers, loose-stripe, thorn
apples, dragon's blood, old man's flannel,
And the horse gentian, dog laurel, cat-tails, snakeweed, spiderwort, pig

weed, sow thistle, skunk cabbage, goose grass, moonseed, poison
hemlock,
These with the names on names between horse radish and the autumn-
flowering orchid of a lavish harvest moon—
These are a few of the names clocked and pronounced by the people in
the moving of the earth from season to season

The red and white men traded plants and words back and forth
The Shawnee haw and the Choctaw root, the paw paw, the potato, the
cohosh and your choice of the yellow puccoon or white,
A cork elm or a western buckthorn or a burning bush, each a wahoo and
all of the wahoo family
These from the tongues of name givers, from a restless name changer, the
people

94

THE sea only knows the bottom of the ship
One grain of wheat holds all the stars
The bosoms of the wise are the tombs of secrets
When you must, walk as if on eggshells
It looks good but is it foolproof?
Only a poor fisherman curses the river he fishes in
I can read your writing but I can't read your mind.
 Threatened men live long
 The glad hand became the icy mitt
Applause is the beginning of abuse
If born to be hanged you shall never be drowned
Life without a friend is death without a witness
 Sleep is the image of death
Six feet of earth make us all of one size
The oldest man that ever lived died at last
The turnip looked big till the pumpkin walked in
The dime looked different when the dollar arrived.
 Who said you are the superintendent?
 Spit on your hands and go to work
Three generations from shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves.
We won't see it but our children will

Everything is in the books
Too many books overload the mind

Who knows the answers?
Step by step one goes far
The greatest cunning is to have none at all
Sow wind and you reap whirlwind
A hundred years is not much but never is a long while
A good blacksmith likes a snootful of smoke
Fire is a good servant and a bad master
You can fight fire with fire
The fireborn are at home in fire.

The stars make no noise
You can't hinder the wind from blowing
Who could live without hope?

95

SAYINGS, sentences, what of them?
Flashes, lullabies, are they worth remembering?
On the babbling tongues of the people have these been kept
In the basic mulch of human culture are these grown
Along with myths of rainbow gold where you shovel all you want and
take it away,
Along with hopes of a promised land, a homestead farm, and a stake in
the country,
Along with prayers for a steady job, a chicken in the pot and two cars in
the garage, the life insurance paid, and a home your own.

In sudden flash and in massive chaos
the tunes and cries of the people
rise in the scripts of Bach and Moussorgsky
The people handle the food you eat, the clothes you wear,
and stick by stick and stone by stone
the houses you live in, roof and walls,
and wheel by wheel, tire by tire,
part by part your assembled car,
and the box car loadings of long and short hauls

Those who have nothing stand in two pressures
Either what they once had was taken away
Or they never had more than subsistence

Long ago an easy category was provided for them

“They live from hand to mouth,”

Having the name of horny-handed sons of toil

From these hands howsoever horny, from these sons,

Pours a living cargo of overwhelming plenty

From land and mill into the world markets

 Their pay for this is what is handed them

Or they take no pay at all if the labor market is glutted,

Losing out on pay if the word is “NO HANDS WANTED
 next month maybe
 next year maybe
 the works start ”

96

Big oil tanks squat next the railroad

The shanties of the poor wear cinder coats

The red and blue lights signal

The control board tells the story

Lights go on and off on a map

Each light is a train gone by

Or a train soon heaving in

 The big chutes grow cold.

 They stack up shadows

 Their humps hold iron ore

 This gang works hard

 Some faces light up to hear

 “We work today—

 what do you know about that?”

97

SOMEBODY has to make the tubs and pails

Not yet do the tubs and pails grow on trees

 and all you do is pick 'em

For tubs and pails we go first to the timber cruisers, to the loggers, hewers,
 sawyers, choppers, peelers, pilers, saw filers, skid greasers, slip tenders,
 teamsters, lumber shovers, tallymen, planers, bandsawmen, circular-
 saw-men, hoopers, matchers, nailers, painters, truckmen, packers,
 haulers,

For the sake of a tub or a pail to you

And for the sake of a jack-knife in your pocket,
or a scissors on your table,
The dynamite works get into production and deliver to the miners who
blast, the mule drivers, engineers and firemen on the dinkies, the
pumpmen, the rope riders, the sinkers and sorters, the carpenters,
electricians and repairmen, the foremen and straw bosses,
They get out the ore and send it to the smelters, the converters where by
the hands and craft of furnace crushers and hot blast handlers, ladlers,
puddlers, the drag-out man, the hook-up man, the chipper, the span-
nerman, the shearsman, the squeezer,
There is steel for the molders, the cutlers, buffers, finishers, forgers,
grinders, polishers, temperers—
This for the sake of a jack-knife to your pocket or a shears on your table
These are the people, with flaws and failings, with patience, sacrifice, de-
votion, the people

The people is a farmer, a tenant and a share-cropper, a plowman, a plow-
grinder and a choreman, a churner, a chicken-picker and a combine
driver, a threshing crew and an old settlers' picnic, a creamery co-
operative, or a line of men on wagons selling tomatoes or sugar-beets
on contract to a cannery, a refinery,

The people is a tall freight-handler and a tough longshoreman, a greasy
fireman and a gambling oil-well shooter with a driller and tooler
ready, a groping miner going underground with a headlamp, an engi-
neer and a fireman with an eye for semaphores, a seaman, deckhand,
pilot at the wheel in fog and stars

The people? A weaver of steel-and-concrete floors and walls fifty floors up,
a blueprint designer, an expert calculator and accountant, a carpenter
with an eye for joists and elbows, a bricklayer with an ear for the pling
of a trowel, a pile-driver crew pounding down the pier-posts

The people? Harness bulls and narcotic dicks, multigraph girls and soda-
jerkers, hat girls, bat boys, sports writers, ghost writers, popcorn and
peanut squads, flatfeet, scavengers, mugs saying "Aw go button your
nose," squirts hollering "Aw go kiss yourself outa dis game intuh
anuddah," dead-heads, hops, cappers, come-ons, tin horns, small
timers, the night club outfits helping the soup-and-fish who have to
do something between midnight and bedtime

The people? A puddler in the flaring splinters of newmade steel, a milk-
wagon-driver getting the once-over from a milk inspector, a sand-hog
with "the bends," a pack-rat, a snow-queen, janitors, jockeys, white

collar lads, pearl divers, peddlers, bundlestiffs, pants pressers, cleaners
and dyers, lice and rat exterminators

So many forgotten, so many never remembered at all, yet there are well-
diggers, school-teachers, window washers who unless buckled proper
dance on air and go down down, coal heavers, roundhouse wipers,
hostlers, sweepers, samplers, weighers, sackers, carvers, bloom chippers,
kiln burners, cocks, bakers, beekeepers, goat raisers, goat hay growers,
slag-rollers, melters, solderers, track greasers, jiggermen, snow-plow
drivers, clamdiggers, stoolpigeons, the buck private, the gob, the leath-
erneck, the cop—

In uniform, in white collars, in overalls, in denim and gingham, a number
on an assembly line, a name on a polling list, a post office address, a
crime and sports page reader, a movie goer and radio listener, a stock-
market sucker, a sure thing for slick gamblers, a union man or non-
union, a job holder or a job hunter,

Always either employed, disemployed, unemployed and employable or
unemployable, a world series fan, a home buyer on a shoestring, a
down-and-out or a game fighter who will die fighting

The people is the grand canyon of humanity
and many many miles across
The people is pandora's box, humpty dumpty,
a clock of doom and an avalanche when it
turns loose
The people rest on land and weather, on time
and the changing winds
The people have come far and can look back
and say, "We will go farther yet"
The people is a plucked goose and a shorn
sheep of legalized fraud
And the people is one of those mountain slopes
holding a volcano of retribution,
Slow in all things, slow in its gathered wrath,
slow in its onward heave,
Slow in its asking "Where are we now? what time
is it?"

98

HOLD down the skylines now with your themes,
Proud marching oblongs of floodlighted walls.

Your bottom rocks and caissons rest
In money and dreams, in blood and wishes

Stand on your tall haunches of checkered windows
with your spikes of white light
Speaking across the cool blue of the night mist
Can we read our writing?
What are we saying on the skyline?

Tell it to us, skyscrapers around Wacker Drive in Chicago,
Tall oblongs in orchestral confusion from Battery to Bronx,
Along Market Street to the Ferry flashing the Golden Gate sunset,
Steel-and-concrete witnesses gazing down in San Antonio on the little old
Alamo,

Gazing down in Washington on the antiques of Pennsylvania Avenue
what are these so near my feet far down?
Blinking across old Quaker footpaths of the City of Brotherly Love what
have we here? shooting crossed lights on the old Boston Common
who goes there?

Rising in Duluth to flicker with windows over Lake Superior, standing up
in Atlanta to face toward Kenesaw Mountain,

Tall with steel automotive roots in Detroit, with transport, coal and oil
roots in Toledo, Cleveland, Buffalo, flickering afar to the ore barges
on Lake Erie, to the looming chainstore trucks on the hard roads,

Wigwagging with air beacons on Los Angeles City Hall, telling the Mis-
sissippi traffic it's night-time in St Louis, New Orleans, Minneapolis
and St Paul—

Can we read our writing? what are we saying on the skyline?
Hold down your horizon spikes of light, proud marching oblongs
Your bottom rocks and pilings rest in money and dreams, in blood and
wishes

The structural iron workers, the riveters and bolt catchers, know what you
cost

Yes, who are these on the harbor skyline,
With the sun gone down and the funnels and checkers of light talking?
Who are these tall witnesses? who these high phantoms?
What can they tell of a thousand years to come,
People and people rising and fading with the springs and autumns, people

like leaves out of the earth in spring, like leaves down the autumn
wind—

What shall a thousand years tell a young tumultuous restless people?
They have made these steel skeletons like themselves—

Lean, tumultuous, restless

They have put up tall witnesses,
to fade in a cool midnight blue,
to rise in evening rainbow prints

99

THE man in the street is fed
with lies in peace, gas in war,
and he may live now
just around the corner from you
trying to sell
the only thing he has to sell,
the power of his hand and brain
to labor for wages, for pay,
for cash of the realm

And there are no takers, he can't connect
Maybe he says, "Some pretty good men are on the street"
Maybe he says, "I'm just a palooka all washed up"
Maybe he's a wild kid ready for his first stickup
Maybe he's bummed a thousand miles and has a diploma.
Maybe he can take whatever the police can hand him,
Too many of him saying in their own wild way,
"The worst they can give you is lead in the guts"
Whatever the wild kids want to do they'll do
And whoever gives them ideas, faiths, slogans,
Whoever touches the bottom flares of them,
Connects with something prouder than all deaths
For they can live on hard corn and like it
They are the original sons of the wild jackass
Crowned and clothed with what the Unknown Soldier had
If he went to his fate in a pride over all deaths
Give them a cause and they are a living dynamite
They are the game fighters who will die fighting

Here and there a man in the street
is young, hard as nails,

cold with questions he asks
from his burning insides

Bred in a motorized world of trial and error
He measures by millionths of an inch,
Knows ball bearings from spiral gearings,
Chain transmission, heat treatment of steel,
Speeds and feeds of automatic screw machines,
Having handled electric tools

With pistol grip and trigger switch
Yet he can't connect and he can name thousands
Like himself idle amid plants also idle
He studies the matter of what is justice
And revises himself on money, comfort, good name
He doesn't know what he wants

And says when he gets it he'll know it

He asks, "Why is this what it is?"

He asks, "Who is paying for this propaganda?"

He asks, "Who owns the earth and why?"

Here and there a wife or sweetheart sees with him
The pity of being sold down the river in a smoke
Of confusions taken from the mouths of the dead
And spoken as though those dead are alive now
And would say now what they said then

"Let him go as far as he likes," says one lawyer who sits on several heavy
directorates

"What do we care? Is he any of our business? If he knew how he could
manage

"There are exceptional cases but where there is poverty you will generally
find they were improvident and lacking in thrift and industry

"The system of free competition we now have has made America the
greatest and richest country on the face of the globe

"You will seek in vain for any land where so large a number of people
have had so many of the good things of life

"The malcontents who stir up class feeling and engender class hatred are
the foremost enemies of our republic and its constitutional govern-
ment"

And so on and so on in further confusions taken from the mouths of the
dead and spoken as though those dead are alive now and would say
now what they said then

Like the form of a seen and unheard prowler,
Like a slow and cruel violence,
is the known unspoken menace
Do what we tell you or go hungry,
listen to us or you don't eat

He walks and walks and walks
and wonders why the hell he built the road

Once I built a railroad
now
brother, can you spare a dime?

To his dry well a man carried
all the water he could carry,
primed the pump, drew out the water,
and now
he has all the water he can carry

We asked the cyclone
to go around our barn
but it didn't hear us

100

THE Great Sphinx and the Pyramids say
"Man passed this way and saw
a lot of ignorant besotted pharaohs"
The pink pagodas, jade rams and marble elephants
of China say
"Man came along here too
and met suave and cruel mandarins"
The temples and forums of Greece and Rome say:
"Man owned man here where man bought and sold
man in the open slave auctions, by these chat-
tels stone was piled on stone to make these now
crumbled pavilions"
The medieval Gothic cathedrals allege
"Mankind said prayers here for itself and for stiff-
necked drunken robber barons"

And the skyscrapers of Manhattan, Detroit, Chicago, London, Paris, Berlin—what will they say when the hoarse and roaring years of their origin have sunk to a soft whispering?

Will the same fathoms come for the skyscrapers?
Will the years heave and the wind and rain haul and hover

Till sand and dust have picked the locks and blown the safes and smashed the windows and filled the elevator-shafts and packed the rooms and made ashes of the papers, the stocks and bonds, the embossed and attested securities?

Will it be colder and colder yet with ice on the ashes?

Even though the title-deeds read “forever and in perpetuity unto heirs and assigns for all time this deed is executed”?

Will it be all smoothed over into a hush where no one pleads

“Who were they? where did they come from? and why were they in such a hurry when they knew so little where they were going?”

As between the rulers and the ruled-over what does the record say?

Name the empires and republics with rulers wise beyond their people

When have they read the signs and recognized a bridge generation?

When have the overlords and their paid liars and strumpets

Held as a first question, “What do the people want besides what we tell them they ought for their own good to want?”?

And second, “How much of living fact is under these cries and revolts, these claims that exploiters ride the people?”?

And third, “What do they do to themselves who sell out the people?”?

When hush money is paid
to whom does it go
and by whom is it paid
and why should there be a hush?

When aldermen and legislative members say,
"We can put this through for you but it will take a
little grease,"
What is the grease they mean and from whom
comes this grease?
Let this be spoken of softly Let sleeping dogs lie
What you don't know won't hurt you
The trail leads straight to those in the possession of
grease, the big shots of bespoken and anointed
interests

When violence is hired
and murder is paid for
and tear gas, clubs, automatics,
and blam blam machine guns
join in the hoarse mandate,
"Get the hell out of here,"
why then reserve a Sabbath
and call it a holiness day
for the mention of Jesus Christ
and why drag in the old quote,
"Thou shalt love thy neighbor
as thyself"?

Said a lady wearing orchids
for a finality they betoken
distinct from cabbages
aloof from potatoes
and speaking with a white finality
from a face molded in half-secrets
"Some things go unspoken in our circle
no one has the bad grace to bring them up
they exist and they don't
when you belong you don't mention them."

Between highballs at the club amid the commodious leather chairs, only
the souse, the fool, would lift a glass with the toast
"Here's to the poor! let 'em suffer, they're used to it"
And if a boy fresh from college and the classics offers the point, "Money
sometimes rots people,"
He'll hear from someone "Maybe so but you can't have too big a surplus
to take care of the future"

"There are men who can be hired
for work that must be done
and I would rather hire them
than do the work myself"
Thus in the front office
the big fellow in charge,
hired by absentee owners,
hired for work that must be done,
has an alibi and good reasons
unless he keeps out of the red
he too goes he hires and fires
he is the overseer in his ears
one droning iron murmur
"We want results, re-sults
"You'll show results or else"
So he hires and fires
new names go on the payroll,
old names are dropped
personnel, production, outlet, sales,
each has its own heebie-jeebies,
each brings its special jitters
the picture always changes
one little innocent new idea
one harmless looking patent
can wreck the works, the payrolls,
the mahogany front office,
the absentee owners
unless the competitor is watched
and met and handled,
either killed off or satisfied,
the works go to rust,

to the weavers of cobwebs
weaving in iron and mahogany
Thus in the front office amid the desk buttons
and the switchboard phone and the private line,
amid slips holding safe-combination-numbers,
amid the keys to safe-deposit-vaults
and the documents known to associates and attorneys
besides other documents held in reserve,
written communications private and confidential,
spoken messages not to be put in writing,
memoranda in low tone to Jones for immediate attention
and withheld from Abernathy for definite reasons
Abernathy having plenty enough to do as it is,
items touching rivals real and potential,
competitors ruthless with a jungle cunning,
competitors fighting in the open with a decent code,
competitors in the red and dazed by the graph
of volume and sales sliding down always down,
telegrams to be sent in cipher strictly and see to it,
telegrams for the press, for Congress, for the public,
quarterly earnings report for investors,
fully detailed report for the Chairman of the Board,
information sheets to be scanned and torn up,
other notations to be read closely and filed
in a fireproof private vault with a time-lock,
signed agreements hardly worth the public eye,
schedules, rebates, allowances, working arrangements—
amid these props
of time and circumstance
a big shot executive sits
with an eye on the board of directors first of all,
next the stockholders owning control,
next the vast eggheaded investing public,
and after these the men who run the works
from the engineers, chemists, geologists, intelligentsia
on to the white collar clerks and bookkeepers
and the overall crews who take whatever weather comes,
in fumes and dust, in smoke, slag and cinders
meeting production and delivery demands—
and finally the buyers, the consumers, the customers,

the people, yes, what will we let them have?

Around a big table—decisions—
wages up, wages down, wages as is—
prices up, prices down, prices as is—
this is the room and the big table
of the high decisions

They may consider lower prices
for the benefit of the consumer
or again to wreck a competitor
They may hold prices down
because it's worth something to have
the good will of the public, the mass buyers
Or they may raise prices and get all they can
while the getting is good, explaining,
"We are not in business for our health,
what we lose or win is our business"
Some of them trail with Marshall Field
"The customer is always right," others with
Cornelius Vanderbilt "The public be damned"
Others say one thing and do another
And what have we here? what is this huddle?
Shall we call them scabs on their class?
Or are they talking to hear themselves talk?
They say Yes to Ford, to Filene, to Johnson,
to the Brookings Institution one little idea
*After allowing for items to protect future operation
every cut in production cost should be shared
with the consumers in lower prices
with the workers in higher wages
thus stabilizing buying power
and guarding against recurrent collapses*
"What is this? Is it economics, poetry or what?
"Do you think you can run my business?
"Are you trying to fly the flag
of Soviet Russia over my office?"
You're in a room now where you hear
anything you want to hear
and the advice often runs
You can do anything you want to
unless they stop you

Sometimes they fight among themselves
in a dog-eat-dog struggle
for control and domination,
sending an opponent to the Isles of Greece,
leaving him not even a shirt,
or letting him leap from a tenth-floor fire-escape

What is to be said
of those rare and suave swine
who pay themselves a fat swag of higher salaries
in the same year they pay stockholders nothing,
cutting payrolls in wage reductions and layoffs?

What of those payday patriots
who took three hundred millions of profit dollars
from powder and supply contracts
in the same years other men by thousands
died with valor or took red wounds in a gray rain
for the sake of a country, a flag?

Lincoln had a word for one crew "respectable scoundrels"
They reaped their profits from the government's necessity in money,
blankets, guns, contracts,
And when they gambled on defeat in May of '64 and sent gold prices to
new peaks
Lincoln groaned, "I wish every one of them had his devilish head shot off"

One by one they will pass
and be laid in numbered graves,
one by one lights out
and candles of remembrance
and rest amid silver handles and heavy roses
and forgotten hymns sung to their forgotten names

101

THE unemployed
without a stake in the country
without jobs or nest eggs
marching they don't know where

marching north south west—
and the deserts
marching east with dust
deserts out of howling dust-bowls
deserts with winds moving them
marching toward Omaha toward Tulsa—
these lead to no easy pleasant conversation
they fall into a dusty disordered poetry

“What was good for our fathers is good enough
for us—let us hold to the past and keep it
all and change it as little as we have to”

Since when has this been a counsel and light
of pioneers? of discoverers? of inventors?
of builders? of makers?

Who should be saying,
“We can buy anything, we always have,
we can fix anything, we always have,
we’re not in the habit of losing,
on the main points we have our way,
we always have”?
who should be saying that and why?

As though yesterday is here today
and tomorrow too will be yesterday
and change on change is never hammered
on the deep anvils of transition
the words may be heard
“Every so often these sons of the wild jackass
have to be handled Let them come
We’ve got the arguments, the propaganda machinery,
the money and the guns Let them come
What was good for our fathers is good enough for
us We fight with the founding fathers”

What is the story of the railroads and banks,
of oil, steel, copper, aluminum, tin?
of the utilities of light, heat, power, transport?
what are the balances of pride and shame?

who took hold of the wilderness and changed it?
who paid the cost in blood and struggle?
what will the grave and considerate historian
loving humanity and hating no one dead or alive
have to write of wolves and people?
what are the names to be remembered with thanks?

Now they justify themselves to themselves
we took things as we found them
we never tried to shoot the moon
we never pretended to be angels
industry and science are slowly
making the world a better place to live in
the weak must go under before the strong
we'll always have the poor and the incompetent

What then of those odd numbers
who have pretended to be angels
while using the fangs of wolves?
and what of the strong ones
who sat high and handsome
till they met stronger ones
till they were torn asunder
and outwolfed by bigger wolves?

And who plucked marvels
of industry and science
out of unexpected corners
unless it was the moon shooters
taking their chances
out in the great sky of the unknown?
who but they have held to a hope
poverty and the poor shall go
and the struggle of man for possessions
of music and craft and personal worth
lifted above the hog-trough level
above the animal dictate
"Do this or go hungry"?

102

"Accordingly, they commenced by an insidious
debauching of the public mind they have
been drugging the public mind"

What was this debauchery? what this drugging?
and how did Abraham Lincoln mean it July 4, 1861?

The public has a mind?

Yes

And men can follow a method
and a calculated procedure
for drugging and debauching it?

Yes

And the whirlwind comes later?

Yes

Can you bewilder men by the millions
with transfusions of your own passions,
mixed with lies and half-lies,
texts torn from contexts,
and then look for peace, quiet, good will
between nation and nation, race and race,
between class and class?

Who are these so ready
with a hate they are sure of,
with a prepared and considered hate?
who are these forehanded ones?

Before the boys in blue and gray
took the filth and gangrene
along with the glory,
Little Aleck Stephens, hazel-eyed
and shrunken, saw it coming

"When I am on one of two trains coming in
opposite directions on a single track,
both engines at high speed—and both
engineers drunk—I get off at the first
station "

Is there a time to counsel,
 "Be sober and patient while yet saying Yes
 to freedom for cockeyed liars and bigots"?

Is there a time to say,
 "The facts and guide measurements are yet
 to be found and put to work there are
 dawns and false dawns read in a ball of
 revolving crystals"?

Is there a time to repeat,
 "The living passion of millions can rise
 into a whirlwind the storm once loose
 who can ride it? you? or you? or you?
 only history, only tomorrow, knows
 for every revolution breaks
 as a child of its own convulsive hour
 shooting patterns never told of beforehand"?

103

THE wind in the corn leaves among the naked stalks
 and the assurances of the October cornhuskers
 throwing the yellow and gold ears into wagons
 and the weatherworn boards of the oblong corncribs
 and the heavy boots of winter roaring
 around the barn doors
 and the cows drowsing in peace at the feed-boxes—
 while sheet steel is riveted into ships and bridges
 and the hangar night shift meets the air mail
 and the steam shovels scoop gravel by the ton
 and the interstate trucks parade on the hard roads
 and the bread-line silhouettes stand in a drizzle
 and in Iowa the state fair prize hog crunches corn
 and on the truck farms this year's scarecrows
 lose the clothes they wore this summer
 and stand next year in a change of rags—
 these are chapters interwoven of the people.

When a slow dim light moves
 on the face of vast waters
 and in its slow dim changing

baffles keen old captains
the reading of the light
in its shifting resolves
is the same as trying to read
the hosts of circumstance
deepening the paths of action
with a decree for the people
"Tomorrow you do this because
you can do nothing else"

What is it now
in the hosts of circumstance
where plainspoken men multiply,
what is it now the people are saying
near enough to the ribs of life
and the flowing face of vast waters
so they will go on saying it
in deepening paths of action
running toward a slow dim decree
"You do this because
you can do nothing else"?

104

WHEN was it long ago the murmurings began
and the joined murmurings
became a moving wall
moving with the authority of a great sea
whose Yes and No
stood in an awful script
in a new unheard-of handwriting?
"No longer," began the murmurings,
"shall the king be king
"nor the son of the king become king
"Their authority shall go
"and their thrones be swept away
"They are too far from us, the people
"They listen too little to us, the people
"They hold their counsels
"without men from the people given a word

"Their ears are so far from us,
"so far from our wants and small belongings,
"we must trim the kings
"into something less than kings"
And the joined murmurings became a moving wall
with Yes and No in an awful script
And the kings became less
The kings shrank

What is it now
the people are beginning
to say—
is it this?
and if so
whither away and
where do we go
from here?

"What about the munitions and money kings,
the war lords and international bankers?
the transportation and credit kings?
the coal, the oil, and the mining kings?
the price-fixing monopoly control kings?
Why are they so far from us?
why do they hold their counsels
without men from the people given a word?
Shall we keep these kings and let their sons
in time become the same manner of kings?
Are their results equal to their authority?
Why are these interests too sacred for discussion?
What documents now call for holy daylight?
what costs, prices, values, are we forbidden to ask?
Are we slowly coming to understand
the distinction between a demagogue squawking
and the presentation of tragic plainspoken fact?
Shall a robber be named a robber when he is one
even though bespoken and anointed he is?
Shall a shame and a crime be mentioned
when it is so plainly there,
when day by day it draws toil, blood, and hunger,
enough of slow death and personal tragedy to certify

the kings who sit today as entrenched kings
are far too far from their people?
What does justice say?
or if justice is become an abstraction or a harlot
what does her harder sister, necessity, say?
Their ears are so far from us,
so far from our wants and small belongings
we must trim these kings of our time
into something less than kings
Of these too it will be written
these kings shrank ”

What is it now
the people are beginning
to say—
is it this?
and if so
whither away and
where do we go from here?

105

ALWAYS the storm of propaganda blows
Buy a paper Read a book Start the radio
Listen in the railroad car, in the bus,
Go to church, to a movie, to a saloon
And always the breezes of personal opinion
are blowing mixed with the doctrines
of propaganda or the chatter of selling spiels
Believe this, believe that Buy these, buy them
Love one-two-three, hate four-five-six
Remember 7-8-9, forget 10-11-12
Go now, don't wait, go now at once and buy
Dada Salts Incorporated, Crazy Horse Crystals,
for whatever ails you and if nothing ails you
it is good for that and we are telling you
for your own good Whatever you are told,
you are told it is for your own good and not
for the special interest of those telling you
Planned economy is forethought and care

Planned economy is regimentation and tyranny
What do you know about planned economy
and how did this argument get started and why?
Let the argument go on

The storm of propaganda blows always
In every air of today the germs float and hover
The shock and contact of ideas goes on
Planned economy will arrive, stand up,
and stay a long time—or planned economy will
take a beating and be smothered
The people have the say-so
Let the argument go on
Let the people listen

Tomorrow the people say Yes or No by one question
“What else can be done?”

In the drive of faiths on the wind today the people know
“We have come far and we are going farther yet ”

Who was the quiet silver-toned agitator who
said he loved every stone of the streets of
Boston, who was a believer in sidewalks, and
had it, “The talk of the sidewalk today is
the law of the land tomorrow”?

“The people,” said a farmer’s wife in a Minnesota country store while
her husband was buying a new post-hole digger,
“The people,” she went on, “will stick around a long time
“The people run the works, only they don’t know it yet—you wait and see ”

Who knows the answers, the cold inviolable truth?
And when have the paid and professional liars done else than bring wrath
and fire, wreck and doom?
And how few they are who search and hesitate and say.
“I stand in this whirlpool and tell you I don’t know and if I did know I
would tell you and all I am doing now is to guess and I give you
my guess for what it is worth as one man’s guess
“Yet I have worked out this guess for myself as nobody’s yes-man and
when it happens I no longer own the priceless little piece of territory

under my own hat, so far gone that I can't even do my own guessing
for myself,
"Then I will know I am one of the unbursed dead, one of the moving
walking stalking talking unbursed dead"

106

SLEEP is a suspension midway
and a conundrum of shadows
lost in meadows of the moon
The people sleep
Ai' ai' the people sleep
Yet the sleepers toss in sleep
and an end comes of sleep
and the sleepers wake
Ai' ai' the sleepers wake!

107

THE people will live on
The learning and blundering people will live on
They will be tricked and sold and again sold
And go back to the nourishing earth for rootholds,
The people so peculiar in renewal and comeback,
You can't laugh off their capacity to take it
The mammoth rests between his cyclonic dramas.

The people so often sleepy, weary, enigmatic,
is a vast huddle with many units saying
"I earn my living
I make enough to get by
and it takes all my time
If I had more time
I could do more for myself
and maybe for others
I could read and study
and talk things over
and find out about things
It takes time
I wish I had the time"

The people is a tragic and comic two-face
 hero and hoodlum phantom and gorilla twist-
 ing to moan with a gargoyle mouth "They
 buy me and sell me it's a game
 sometime I'll break loose "

Once having marched
 Over the margins of animal necessity,
 Over the grim line of sheer subsistence
 Then man came
 To the deeper rituals of his bones,
 To the lights lighter than any bones,
 To the time for thinking things over,
 To the dance, the song, the story,
 Or the hours given over to dreaming,
 Once having so marched

Between the finite limitations of the five senses
 and the endless yearnings of man for the beyond
 the people hold to the humdrum bidding of work and food
 while reaching out when it comes their way
 for lights beyond the prism of the five senses,
 for keepsakes lasting beyond any hunger or death
 This reaching is alive
 The panderers and liars have violated and smutted it.
 Yet this reaching is alive yet
 for lights and keepsakes

The people know the salt of the sea
 and the strength of the winds
 lashing the corners of the earth
 The people take the earth
 as a tomb of rest and a cradle of hope
 Who else speaks for the Family of Man?
 They are in tune and step
 with constellations of universal law

The people is a polychrome,
 a spectrum and a prism
 held in a moving monolith,

a console organ of changing themes,
a clavilux of color poems
wherein the sea offers fog
and the fog moves off in rain
and the labrador sunset shortens
to a nocturne of clear stars
serene over the shot spray
of northern lights

The steel mill sky is alive
The fire breaks white and zigzag
shot on a gun-metal gloaming
Man is a long time coming
Man will yet win
Brother may yet line up with brother

This old anvil laughs at many broken hammers
There are men who can't be bought
The fireborn are at home in fire
The stars make no noise
You can't hinder the wind from blowing
Time is a great teacher
Who can live without hope?

In the darkness with a great bundle of grief
the people march
In the night, and overhead a shovel of stars for
keeps, the people march

“Where to? what next?”

NEW SECTION

FOR
KENNETH AND LETHA DODSON

War-Time

STORMS BEGIN FAR BACK

STORMS begin far back

You can't have a storm offhand
like somebody took a notion and
decided a storm would be right
handy to come off now and here

The moan and lash of the winds
came out of a place nice for
them, nice for their growing

The anger of the waters lay
breeding, spawning, pent up
and ready to go

The blaze of the prongs,
the zigzags of forked fire,
they had a long seed-time
in a womb of unborn flame
before they went to town
and came howling, "You don't
know what goes on here but
we'll tell you "

This storm now didn't come out of nowhere
—it had a starting place, a home and womb
—far back it began, brother, sister,
—far back, sweetheart

[Voices]

BOOKS MEN DIE FOR

LIGHTS or no lights,
so they stand waiting
 books men die for

For this a man was hanged
For this a man was burned
For this two million candles
 snuffed their finish
For this a man was shot

Open the covers, they speak,
they cry, they come out as from
open doors with voices, heartbeats

Fools I say hats off
Fools I say, who did better?
Fools I say with you
 What of it?

You books in the dark now with the lights off,
You books now with the lights on,
 What is the drip, drip, from your covers?
 What is the lip murmur, the lost winds wandering
 from your covers?
Books men die for—
 I say with you what of it?

OPEN LETTER TO THE POET ARCHIBALD MACLEISH WHO
HAS FORSAKEN HIS MASSACHUSETTS FARM TO
MAKE PROPAGANDA FOR FREEDOM

THOMAS JEFFERSON had red hair and a violin
and he loved life and people and music
and books and writing and quiet thoughts—
a lover of peace, decency, good order,

summer corn ripening for the bins of winter,
cows in green pastures, colts sucking at mares,
apple trees waiting to laugh with pippins—
Jefferson loved peace like a good farmer
And yet—for eight years he fought in a war—
writing with his own hand the war announcement
named The Declaration of Independence
making The Fourth of July a sacred calendar date
And there was his friend and comrade
Ben Franklin, the printer, bookman, diplomat
all Franklin asked was they let him alone
so he could do his work as lover of peace and work—
Franklin too made war for eight years—
the same Franklin who said two nations
would better throw dice than go to war—
he threw in with fighters for freedom—
for eight years he threw in all he had
the books, the printshop, fun with electricity,
searches and researches in science pure and applied—
these had to wait while he joined himself
to eight long years of war for freedom, independence.

Now, of course, these two odd fellows
stand as only two among many
the list runs long of these fellows,
lovers of peace, decency, good order,
who throw in with all they've got
for the abstractions "freedom," "independence"
Strictly they were gentle men, not hunting trouble.
Strictly they wanted quiet, the good life, freedom
They would rather have had the horses of instruction
those eight years they gave to the tigers of wrath
The record runs they were both dreamers
at the same time they refused imitations of the real thing
at the same time they stood up and talked back
at the same time they met the speech of steel and cunning with their
own relentless steel and cunning

[1940]

MR ATTILA

THEY made a myth of you, professor,
you of the gentle voice,
the books, the specs,
the furtive rabbit manners
in the mortar-board cap
and the medieval gown

They didn't think it, eh professor?
On account of you're so absent-minded,
you bumping into the tree and saying,
"Excuse me, I thought you were a tree,"
passing on again blank and absent-minded

Now it's "Mr Attila, how do you do?"
Do you pack wallops of wholesale death?
Are you the practical dynamic son-of-a-gun?
Have you come through with a few abstractions?
Is it you Mr Attila we hear saying,
"I beg your pardon but we believe we have made some degree of progress
on the residual qualities of the atom"?

[August, 1945]

IS THERE ANY EASY ROAD TO FREEDOM?

A RELENTLESS man loved France
Long before she came to shame
And the eating of bitter dust,
Loving her as mother and torch,
As bone of his kith and kin
And he spoke passion, warning:
"Rest is not a word of free peoples—
rest is a monarchical word"

A relentless Russian loved Russia
Long before she came to bare agony

And valor amid rivers of blood,
Loving her as mother and torch,
As bone of his kith and kin
He remembered an old Swedish saying
"The fireborn are at home in fire"

A Kentucky-born Illinoisan found himself
By journey through shadows and prayer
The Chief Magistrate of the American people
Pleading in words close to low whispers
*"Fellow citizens we cannot escape history.
The fiery trial through which we pass
Will light us down in honor or dishonor
To the latest generation .
We shall nobly save or meanly lose
the last best hope of earth"*
Four little words came worth studying over
"We must disenthral ourselves"
And what is a thrall? And who are thralls?
Men tied down or men doped, or men drowsy?
He hoped to see them
shake themselves loose
and so be disenthralled

There are freedom shouters
There are freedom whisperers
Both may serve
Have I, have you, been too silent?
Is there an easy crime of silence?
Is there any easy road to freedom?

[December, 1941]

THE MAN WITH THE BROKEN FINGERS

(When this tale of methodically inflicted agony was published in The Chicago Times Syndicate newspapers August 23, 1942, it brought inquiries whether it was war propaganda or based on an actual incident. My informant was a Norwegian ski champion known as Lieutenant "Andreas" for the safety of his home kinfolk. He gave the incident as he had it from the son of the main tragic figure. Among many other related points was one of German soldiers whose minds began to crack under the strain of the inhuman acts required of them by their superiors, such soldiers being returned to Germany as "mental cases" needing therapeutic treatment. "Andreas," a sober and modest hero, was killed in a bomber flight over Berlin. Friends of "Andreas" say the story below had translation into other languages and circulation by undergrounds.)

THE Man with the Broken Fingers throws a shadow
Down from the spruce and evergreen mountain timbers of Norway—
And across Europe and the Mediterranean to the oasis palms of Libya—
He lives and speaks a sign language of lost fingers
From a son of Norway who slipped the Gestapo nets, the Nazi patrols,
The story comes as told among those now in Norway

Shrines in their hearts they have for this nameless man
Who refused to remember names names names the Gestapo wanted
"Tell us these names. Who are they? Talk! We want those names!"
And the man faced them, looked them in the eye, and hours passed and
no names came—hours on hours and no names for the Gestapo
They told him they would break him as they had broken others
The rubber hose slammed around face and neck,
The truncheon handing pain with no telltale marks,
Or the distinction of the firing squad and death in a split second—
The Gestapo considered these and decided for him something else again
"Tell us those names. Who were they? Talk! Names now—or else!"
And no names came—over and over and no names

So they broke the little finger of the left hand
Three fingers came next and the left thumb bent till it broke
Still no names and there was a day and night for rest and thinking it over
Then again the demand for names and he gave them the same silence
And the little finger of the right hand felt itself twisted,
Back and back twisted till it hung loose from a bleeding socket
Then three more fingers crashed and splintered one by one
And the right thumb back and back into shattered bone

Did he think about violins or accordions he would never touch again?
Did he think of baby or woman hair he would never again play with?
Or of hammers or pencils no good to him any more?
Or of gloves and mittens that would always be misfits?
He may have laughed half a moment over a Gestapo job
So now for a while he would handle neither knife nor fork
Nor lift to his lips any drinking-cup handle
Nor sign his name with a pen between thumb and fingers

And all this was halfway—there was more to come
The Gestapo wit and craft had an aim
They wanted it known in Norway the Gestapo can be terrible
They wanted a wide whispering of fear
Of how the Nazis handle those who won't talk or tell names
"We give you one more chance to co-operate"
Yet he had no names for them
His locked tongue, his Norwegian will pitted against Nazi will,
His pride and faith in a free man's way,
His welcoming death rather than do what they wanted—
They brought against this their last act of fury,
Breaking the left arm at the elbow,
Breaking it again at the shoulder socket—
And when he came to in a flicker of opening eyes
They broke the right arm first at the elbow, then the shoulder
By now of course he had lost all memory of names, even his own
And there are those like you and me and many many others
Who can never forget the Man with the Broken Fingers
His will, his pride as a free man, shall go on
His shadow moves and his sacred fingers speak
He tells men there are a thousand writhing shattering deaths
Better to die one by one than to say yes yes yes
When the answer is no no no and death is welcome and death comes soon
And death is a quiet step into a sweet clean midnight

[August 23, 1942]

FREEDOM IS A HABIT

FREEDOM is a habit
and a coat worn
some born to wear it

some never to know it
Freedom is cheap
or again as a garment
is so costly
men pay their lives
rather than not have it
Freedom is baffling
men having it often
know not they have it
till it is gone and
they no longer have it
What does this mean?
Is it a riddle?
Yes, it is first of all
in the primers of riddles
To be free is so-so
you can and you can't
walkers can have freedom
only by never walking
away their freedom
runners too have freedom
unless they overrun
eaters have often outeaten
their freedom to eat
and drinkers overdrank
their fine drinking freedom

[June 13, 1943]

ELEPHANTS ARE DIFFERENT TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

WILSON and Pilcer and Snack stood before the zoo elephant

Wilson said, "What is its name? Is it from Asia or Africa? Who feeds it? Is it a he or a she? How old is it? Do they have twins? How much does it cost to feed? How much does it weigh? If it dies, how much will another one cost? If it dies, what will they use the bones, the fat, and the hide for? What use is it besides to look at?"

Pilcer didn't have any questions, he was murmuring to himself, "It's a house by itself, walls and windows, the ears came from tall corn-fields, by God, the architect of those legs was a workman, by God, he

stands like a bridge out across deep water, the face is sad and the eyes are kind, I know elephants are good to babies”

Snack looked up and down and at last said to himself, “He’s a tough son-of-a-gun outside and I’ll bet he’s got a strong heart, I’ll bet he’s strong as a copper-riveted boiler inside”

They didn’t put up any arguments

They didn’t throw anything in each other’s faces

Three men saw the elephant three ways

And let it go at that

They didn’t spoil a sunny Sunday afternoon,

“Sunday comes only once a week,” they told each other

ON A FLIMMERING FLOOM YOU SHALL RIDE

Summary and footnote of and on the testimony of the poet MacLeish under appointment as Assistant Secretary of State, under oath before a Congressional examining committee pressing him to divulge the portents and meanings of his poems

Nobody noogers the shaff of a sloo
 Nobody slimbers a wench with a winch
 Nor higgles armed each with a niggle
 and each the flimdrat of a smee,
 each the inbiddy hum of a smoo

Then slong me dorst with the flagdarsh
 Then creep me deep with the crawbright
 Let idle winds ploodaddle the dorshes
 And you in the gold of the gloaming
 You shall be sloam with the hoolriffs

On a flimmering floom you shall ride
 They shall tell you bedish and desist
 On a flimmering floom you shall ride

[Poetry]

SCROLL

MEMORY is when you look back
 and the answers float in
 to who? what? when? where?

The members who were there then
are repeated on a screen
are recalled on a scroll
are moved in a miniature drama,
are collected and recollected
for actions, speeches, silences,
set forth by images of the mind
and made in a mingling mist
to do again and to do over
precisely what they did do once—
this is memory—
sometimes slurred and blurred—
this is remembering—
sometimes wrecking the images
and proceeding again to reconstruct
what happened and how,
the many little involved answers
to who? what? when? where?
and more involved than any
how? how?

THE FIREBORN ARE AT HOME IN FIRE

Luck is a star
Money is a plaything
Time is a storyteller
The sky goes high, big
The sky goes wide and blue
And the fireborn—they go far—
being at home in fire

Can you compose yourself
The same as a bright bandana,
A bandana folded blue and cool,
Whatever the high howling,
The accents of blam blam?
Can I, can John Smith, John Doe,
Whatever the awful accents,
Whatever the horst wessel hiss,

Whatever books be burnt and crisp,
Whatever hangmen bring their hemp,
Whatever horsemen sweep the sunsets,
Whatever hidden hovering candle
Sways as a wafer of light?

Can you compose yourself
The same as a bright bandana,
A bandana folded blue and cool?
Can I, too, drop deep down
In a pool of cool remembers,
In a float of fine smoke blue,
In a keeping of one pale moon,
Weaving our wrath in a pattern
Woven of wrath gone down,
Crossing our scarlet zigzags
With pools of cool blue,
With floats of smoke blue?

Can you, can I, compose ourselves
In wraps of personal cool blue,
In sheets of personal smoke blue?
 Bach did it, Johann Sebastian
So did the one and only John Milton
 And the old slave Epictetus
 And the other slave Spartacus
 And Brother Francis of Assisi
So did General George Washington
 On a horse, in a saddle,
 On a boat, in heavy snow,
 In a loose cape overcoat
 And snow on his shoulders
So did John Adams, Jackson, Jefferson
So did Lincoln on a cavalry horse
At the Chancellorsville review
 With platoons right, platoons left,
In a wind nearly blowing the words away
 Asking the next man on a horse
"What's going to become of all these
 boys when the war is over?"

The shape of your shadow
Comes from you—and you only?
Your personal fixed decisions
Out of you—and your mouth only?
Your No, your Yes, your own?

Bronze old timers belong here
Yes, they might be saying
Shade the flame
Back to final points
Of all sun and fog
In the moving frame
Of your personal eyes
Then stand to the points
Let hunger and hell come
Or ashes and shame poured
On your personal head
Let death shake its bones
The teaching goes back far
Compose yourself

Luck is a star
Money is a plaything
Time is a storyteller
And the sky goes blue with mornings
And the sky goes bronze with sunsets
And the fireborn—they go far—
being at home in fire

[*Collier's*, September 4, 1943]

MR LONGFELLOW AND HIS BOY
(*An old-fashioned recitation to be read aloud*)

MR LONGFELLOW, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow,
the Harvard Professor,
the poet whose pieces you see in all the schoolbooks,
"Tell me not in mournful numbers
life is but an empty dream "

Mr Longfellow sits in his Boston library writing,
Mr Longfellow looks across the room
 and sees his nineteen-year-old boy
propped up in a chair at a window,
home from the war,
a rifle ball through right and left shoulders

In his diary the father writes about his boy
 “He has a wound through him a foot long
 He pretends it does not hurt him ”
And the father if he had known
would have told the boy propped up in a chair
how one of the poems written in that room
 made President Lincoln cry
And both the father and the boy
would have smiled to each other and felt good
about why the President had tears over that poem

Noah Brooks, the California newspaperman,
could have told the Longfellows how one day
Brooks heard the President saying two lines
 “Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State!
 Sail on, O Union, strong and great!”
Noah Brooks, remembering more of the poem, speaks
 “Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State!
 Sail on, O Union, strong and great!
 Humanity with all its fears,
 With all the hopes of future years,
 Is hanging breathless on thy fate!
 We know what Master laid thy keel,
 What workmen wrought thy ribs of steel,
 Who made each mast, and sail, and rope,
 What anvils rang, what hammers beat,
 In what a forge and what a heat
 Were shaped the anchors of thy hope!
 Fear not each sudden sound and shock,
 ’Tis of the wave and not the rock,
 ’Tis but the flapping of the sail,
 And not a rent made by the gale!
 In spite of rock and tempest’s roar,

In spite of false lights on the shore,
Sail on, nor fear to breast the sea!
Our hearts, our hopes, are all with thee,
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,
Are all with thee—are all with thee!"

Noah Brooks sees Lincoln's eyes filled with tears,
the cheeks wet
They sit quiet a little while, then Lincoln saying
"It is a wonderful gift to be able to stir men like that "
Mr Longfellow—and his boy sitting propped up in a chair—
with a bullet wound a foot long in his shoulders—
would have liked to hear President Lincoln saying
those words

Now Mr Longfellow is gone far away, his boy, too,
gone far away,
and they never dreamed how seventy-eight years later
the living President of the United States, in the White House at Wash-
ington,
takes a pen, writes with his own hand on a sheet of paper
about the Union Ship of State sailing on and on—
never going down—
how the President hands that sheet of paper
to a citizen soon riding high in the air, high over salt water,
high in the ram and the sun and the mist over
the Atlantic Ocean,
riding, pounding, flying, everything under control,
crossing the deep, wide Atlantic in a day and a night,
coming to London on the Thames in England,
standing before the First Minister of the United Kingdom
so the whole English-language world
from England across North America to Australia and
New Zealand
can never forget Mr Longfellow's lines
"Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State!
Sail on, O Union, strong and great!"

[*Collier's*, June 14, 1941]

THE LONG SHADOW OF LINCOLN A LITANY

(We can succeed only by concert The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate
to the stormy present The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with
the occasion As our case is new so we must think anew and act anew We must dis
enthral ourselves DECEMBER 1, 1862 *The President's Message to Congress*)

Be sad, be cool, be kind,
remembering those now dreamdust
hallowed in the ruts and gullies,
solemn bones under the smooth blue sea,
faces warblown in a falling rain

Be a brother, if so can be,
to those beyond battle fatigue
each in his own corner of earth
 or forty fathoms undersea
 beyond all boom of guns,
 beyond any bong of a great bell,
 each with a bosom and number,
 each with a pack of secrets,
each with a personal dream and doorway
and over them now the long endless winds
 with the low healing song of time,
 the hush and sleep murmur of time.

Make your wit a guard and cover
Sing low, sing high, sing wide
Let your laughter come free
remembering looking toward peace
"We must disenthral ourselves "

Be a brother, if so can be,
to those thrown forward
for taking hardwon lines,
for holding hardwon points
 and their reward so-so,
little they care to talk about,
their pay held in a mute calm,
highspot memories going unspoken,

what they did being past words,
what they took being hardwon
 Be sad, be kind, be cool
 Weep if you must
And weep open and shameless
 before these altars

There are wounds past words
There are cripples less broken
than many who walk whole
 There are dead youths
 with wrists of silence
 who keep a vast music
 under their shut lips,
what they did being past words,
their dreams like their deaths
beyond any smooth and easy telling,
having given till no more to give

There is dust alive
with dreams of The Republic,
with dreams of the Family of Man
flung wide on a shrinking globe
 with old timetables,
 old maps, old guide-posts
 torn into shreds,
 shot into tatters,
 burnt in a firewind,
 lost in the shambles,
 faded in rubble and ashes

There is dust alive
Out of a granite tomb,
Out of a bronze sarcophagus,
Loose from the stone and copper
Steps a whitesmoke ghost
Lifting an authoritative hand
In the name of dreams worth dying for,
In the name of men whose dust breathes
 of those dreams so worth dying for,

what they did being past words,
beyond all smooth and easy telling

Be sad, be kind, be cool,
remembering, under God, a dreamdust
hallowed in the ruts and gullies,
solemn bones under the smooth blue sea,
faces warblown in a falling rain

Sing low, sing high, sing wide
Make your wit a guard and cover.
Let your laughter come free
like a help and a brace of comfort

The earth laughs, the sun laughs
over every wise harvest of man,
over man looking toward peace
by the light of the hard old teaching
"We must disenthral ourselves "

Read as the Phi Beta Kappa poem at the Mother Chapter of William and Mary College, Williamsburg, Virginia, December, 1944 Published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, February, 1945

WHEN DEATH CAME APRIL TWELVE 1945

CAN a bell ring in the heart
telling the time, telling a moment,
telling off a stillness come,
in the afternoon a stillness come
and now never come morning?

Now never again come morning,
say the tolling bells repeating it,
now on the earth in blossom days,
in earthy days and potato planting,
now to the stillness of the earth,
to the music of dust to dust
and the drop of ashes to ashes
he returns and it is the time,

the afternoon time and never come morning,
the voice never again, the face never again

A bell rings in the heart telling it
and the bell rings again and again
remembering what the first bell told,
the going away, the great heart still—
and they will go on remembering
and they is you and you and me and me

And there will be roses and spring blooms
flung on the moving oblong box, emblems endless
flung from nearby, from faraway earth corners,
from frontline tanks nearing Berlin
unseen flowers of regard to The Commander,
from battle stations over the South Pacific
silent tokens saluting The Commander

And the whitening bones of men at sea bottoms
or huddled and mouldering men at Aachen,
they may be murmuring,
“Now he is one of us,”
one answering muffled drums
in the realm and sphere of the shadow battalions

Can a bell ring proud in the heart
over a voice yet lingering,
over a face past any forgetting,
over a shadow alive and speaking,
over echoes and lights come keener, come deeper?

Can a bell ring in the heart
in time with the tall headlines,
the high fidelity transmitters,
the somber consoles rolling sorrow,
the choirs in ancient laments—chanting
“Dreamer, sleep deep,
Toiler, sleep long,
Fighter, be rested now,
Commander, sweet good night”

[*Woman's Home Companion*, June, 1945]

Present Hour

JAN, THE SON OF THOMAS

As I said before one Saturday night
when the moon hung a curve of flame,
in the east a baby-shoe of silver
 I must forget the last war,
 never remember the war before,
 nor the wars on wars far back
 I must put them away
 in a black sack filled
 and packed high with forgettings
 and then by one marvel of oblivion
 forget the next war
 putting the war to come
 in the same black sack of forgettings

This could be a subtle trick
learned out of patient practice,
an act of will and humor
often performed beforehand
in repeated images of the mind—
a device of double contemplations
 looking to the east, to the west,
 hearing the voices of the next war

Was I not always a laughing man?
Did I ever fail of ready jests?
Have I added a final supreme jest?
They may write where my ashes quiver
 “He loved mankind for its very faults
 He knew how to forget all wars past
 He so acted
 as to forget the next war”

PEACE BETWEEN WARS

BETWEEN the long wars
there has always been peace
and likewise
between the short wars

The longer the wars
the less was the peace
while the wars went on
and the shorter the wars
the sooner the peace came.

Whenever the peace
came to an end
the resulting war
always ran
either short or long

Whenever a war ended
the resulting peace
ran till the next war

Thus each peace
had its punctuation
by a war short or long
and each war at its end
ushered in an era
of peace short or long

Therefore we know
absolutely,
incontestably,
the peace we now see
will run
till the next war begins
whereupon peace
will be ushered in
at the end of the next war

Beyond this
we know little
absolutely, incontestably

SCRIPTSMITH

I GIVE you the cosmos, freely the whole works
Go to it, take the works and run it
Or let it run itself
Maybe if you stand off by yourself
You'll see the entire intricate farflung
 shebang of the universe
 the whole complicated sidereal affair
running itself like a watch God made
 and God will see to winding it
 so you dont have to get up in the night
 saying you forgot to wind it—
Hi bud—I give you the cosmos, the whole works—
Freely I hand it to you to keep
Freely you can hand it to whoever you think
 might want it to keep
And now a few words from our sponsor
He is a rat, a louse, a lobscouse,
 a mismash slicker,
 a loudmouth liblab

ENEMY NUMBER ONE

"I WRITE for antiquity,"
said a handsome mournful galoot
thereby cancelling every last other one
who might be saying,
"I write for posterity,"
as though antiquity was never posterity
to its preceding antiquities
and as though nevertheless
our posterity will never be an antiquity
to its successive posterities,

as though each posterity has not said
to several precessive antiquities,
"Kiss my posterior and forget about it"

He never had no fun, is that it?
All around him animals
 eating each other,
 eating themselves,
snarling slithering conniving animals
Each citizen, except himself and his elite,
 nothing less than a heel
No grand designs, no high hopes, no banners
 nor slogans nor shibboleths
 worth any man's following
You could summarize his row of books
 Humanity is a mess of eels and heels
 The human race is its own Enemy Number One
 For him the Family of Man stinks now
 and if you look back
 for him it always has stunk

WORMS AND THE WIND

WORMS would rather be worms
Ask a worm and he says, "Who knows what a worm knows?"
Worms go down and up and over and under
Worms like tunnels
When worms talk they talk about the worm world
Worms like it in the dark
Neither the sun nor the moon interests a worm
Zigzag worms hate circle worms
Curve worms never trust square worms
Worms know what worms want
Slide worms are suspicious of crawl worms
One worm asks another, "How does your belly drag today?"
The shape of a crooked worm satisfies a crooked worm
A straight worm says, "Why not be straight?"
Worms tired of crawling begin to slither
Long worms slither farther than short worms
Middle-sized worms say, "It is nice to be neither long nor short"

Old worms teach young worms to say, "Don't be sorry for me unless you have been a worm and lived in worm places and read worm books"
 When worms go to war they dig in, come out and fight, dig in again, come out and fight again, dig in again, and so on
 Worms underground never hear the wind overground and sometimes they ask, "What is this wind we hear of?"

THE ABRACADABRA BOYS

THE abracadabra boys—have they been in the stacks and cloisters? Have they picked up languages for throwing into chow mein poems?
 Have they been to a sea of jargons and brought back jargons? Their salutations go Who cometh? and, It ith I cometh
 They know postures from impostures, pistils from pustules, to hear them tell it They foregather and make pitty pat with each other in Latin and in their private pig Latin, very ofay
 They give with passwords "Who cometh?" "A kumquat cometh" "And how cometh the kumquat?" "On an abbadabba, ancient and honorable sire, ever and ever on an abbadabba"
 Do they have fun? Sure—their fun is being what they are, like our fun is being what we are—only they are more sorry for us being what we are than we are for them being what they are
 Pointing at you, at us, at the rabble, they sigh and say, these abracadabra boys, "They lack jargons They fail to distinguish between pustules and pistils They knoweth not how the kumquat cometh"

SHOES OF TRAVEL

AFTER overwhelming filth and amazing betrayals Odd Nansen looked at the concentration camp and was reminded of Norse folk-lore "What is the *white* layer in chicken dung?" "Oh, that's chicken dung too" This comes bitter as an Arabic, "The shadow of the hunchback? That too is hunched"

"I had no shoes, and I murmured, till I met a man who had no feet." And what did they say? What words passed between the barefoot and the footless? If Barefoot spoke thanks with overmuch of pity did he get curses, laughter or silence from Footless?

"Look under your hat—it may tell you something" The Armenians pass this along and further allege, "A man from hell is not afraid of hot ashes" And what woman of them weaving a shadowed tapestry first began asking, "What can the rose do in the sea or a violet before the fire?"

"A good heart always does a little extra" The Chinese give it "The people's heart is heaven's will," they have been saying for long, and "Cleanse your heart as you would cleanse a dish Vast chasms can be filled but the heart of man never Emptiness of a heart prepares it for good news The emptiness of a valley makes it yield an echo"

"When a Jew has a boil he has no onion and when he has an onion he has no boil" The Jews tell it with laughter And somberly they say, "It will not be any lighter until it is first quite dark" Yet why should the Swiss be saying, "Night, love, and women give wrong ideas"? What then becomes of ten thousand poems written to night, to love, to women?

Freedom is everybody's job Everybody is freedom's job Jobs are everybody's freedom When freedom sneaks everybody should listen And everybody should be free to do what? When freedom flits then what? And should the question be asked continuously, oh constantly, like this "Who paid for my freedom and what the price and am I somehow beholden"?

TURN OF THE WHEEL

THEY are old over there, older than we are
 They fathered our speech and mothered many a document we hold dear.
 We came from there in the seeds of our forefathers
 We are in debt to them, we owe them much
 Yet we came away from them because we wanted no more of what they
 held out to us.
 We are the same as they and yet not the same
 And in the turn of the wheel of time we shall not be the same nor shall
 they

Never did the map of Europe stay put
 Wave on wave swept over it in change on change
 What one time belonged here in another time belonged there
 And the shift of the belongings had always a cost of strife and cunning
 This river once ours no longer is ours and those mountains once we owned
 we no longer own

And there are plains and rich valleys we took back and lost again and won
and once more lost
Geography costs—why does the map of Europe never stay put?
Why do these cries go ringing so endless over land and its boundary
claims, over who shall own land and make it pay?

MANY HANDLES

BEWARE writing of freedom the idea is political
Beware too writing of discipline there too is politics
Be careful of abstractions they become bright moths
When images come test them by trial and error let them vanish should
they choose exits
Would you accept a thesis in governance of the writing of poems?
Why not listen to these poets on how those ones fall into categories the
same as eggs or potatoes?
Your personal choice has high validity and fidelity—for you Bruddah
Bones—for you—alone—by yourself—in the dust—in the wing whirr
of midges morning-born and noon-demised
Light rose-candles and contemplate yourselves, gentlemen all—speak lofty
praise of each other—form cliques or claques and wear mandarin
queues taking your cues from each other—it has been done
Let the cubes go by themselves in declarations they have the answers
while likewise the globes foregather and rate the globes as having the
finalities of the exquisite far-flung verities
Have we not heard conversations between cube and globe and neither of
them enjoying the shape of the other?
Has not the square stood up and publicly called the circle a sonofabitch
because of animosities induced by the inevitable mutual contradic-
tions of form?
Now the rats—there we may have something—the rats make war on all
forms non-rat—wherefrom and howcome the enduring plasm of the
rat—the ageless and timeless unity and fraternity of the rats?

Many the handles whereby to take hold,
many the dishes to choose and eat therefrom,
many the faces never chosen
yet worn by many as though chosen
as though saying, "This one on me my choice was"

In the Dark Ages many there and then
had fun and took love and made visions
and listened when Voices came
Then as now were the Unafraid
Then as now, "What if I am dropped into levels
of ambiguous dust and covered
over and forgotten? Have I in my
time taken worse?"

Then as now, "What if I am poured into numbers
of the multitudinous sea and sunk
in massive swarming fathoms? Have
I gone through this last year
and the year before?"

In either Dark Ages or Renaissance have there
been ever the Immeasurable Men, the Incalculable
Women, their outlooks timeless?

Of Rabelais, is it admissible he threw an excel-
lent laughter and his flagons and ovens made
him a name?

Of Piers Plowman, is it permissible he made sad
lovable songs out of stubborn land, straw and
hoe-handles, barefoot folk treading dirt floors?
Should it be the Dark Ages recur, will there be
again the Immeasurable Men, the Incalculable
Women?

THE UNKNOWN WAR

Be calm, collected, easy

In the face of the next war to come, be calm

In the faint light and smoke of the flash and the mushroom of the first
bomb blast of the Third World War, keep your wits collected

At the information to be given out, after the few days of the fast moving
next war, take it easy, be calm and collected, and say to yourself, First
things come first and after this world comes another

Beware of the matters not to be spoken of

Beware of such matters as must be spoken of.

Watch your ears as to things heard often

Watch your ears as to things seldom heard.

Pick and choose of what comes to your ears
 Select and sift, believe or disbelieve
 And on stated occasions, feeling a little high,
 Believe perfectly in the completely unbelievable,
 Thus making, under the tilt and feel of your hat,
 Myths your own, miracles beheld of your eyes alone.

"Introducing," said a spieler, winking at a shill, "introducing Miss Nuclear Fission, a wild gal in her time and she's gonna be wilder yet, and you notice I don't dare touch her she's that wild"

"Introducing," said a spieler with a cock-eye at a shill, "introducing Mr Chain Reaction, her pal and dancing partner, a hairy brute, ten billion gorillas in one and when he tickles you, what gives? Nothin—only you die laughin"

So what? So we must be calm, collected, easy, facing the next war,
 And we can remember the man sitting on a red hot stove as he sniffed the air, "Is something burning?"

Or the Kansas farmer, "We asked the cyclone to go around our barn but it didn't hear us"

Or we can turn to the Books and take a looksee and then take a cry or a laugh, as it pleases

They say, do the Books Begin your war and it becomes something else than you saw before it began—it runs longer or shorter than planned, it comes out like nobody running it expected, ending with both sides saying, "We are surprised at what happened!"

A Marshal of France spoke like a gambler flipping a card or throwing ivory cubes, saying as though he had finished what might be said "The controlling factor in war is the Unknown."

Wherefore we take a deep look into the unfathomable and come out with a fingerhold on wriggling deductions fished from a barrel of conniving and fructifying eels

The bombs of the next war, if they control, hold the Unknown blasts—the bacterial spreads of the next war, if they control, reek with the Unknown—the round-the-curve-of-the-earth guided missiles of the next war, should they control, will have the slide and hiss of the Unknown—the cosmic rays or light beams carrying a moonshine kiss of death, if and when they control, will have the mercy of the sudden Unknown

We shall do the necessary
 We shall meet the inevitable

We shall be prepared
We shall stand before the Unknown,
aware of the controlling factor
 the controlling factor
 the controlling factor
 —the Unknown

Packsack

1. Early Period

NOCTURN IV

THE claims of the sea, of the tide, move out
The moon comes in with a claim its own
Painters on the beach paint their claims
 The chains drip with smears of this mystery.
 The brushes chase the smear over canvas
 Preliminary sketches are baffled by claims
The brass mist holds a long arm over the molten sea-moon gold, the
 changing sea-mist brass
Tall sea winds come with their claims and make the picture something else
 again
Memories of sea mist may be voices, faces, with melting brass lights gone
 before tall winds

[1908]

BRIM

BRIM's hammer hit a wheelbarrow, a sliver of iron sent itself through the lens of the eye into the eyeball

Brim in the white sheets wonders if he will lose an eye and if a wedding is put off when a woman says a one-eyed man won't do

The doc says maybe the eye will last, the doc X-rays, goes in with a knife, holds the slit with wires, pulls the sliver out with a magnet, stitches the eyeball, and says a week later the eye is saved

Brim knows now the wedding comes off, among the white sheets with one eye dark he knows his sweetheart will not face a one-eyed man at the breakfasts of life's years

A month, the doc knows the eye is lost, the doc is thinking, it is not so easy to tell a man one eye is lost, still more it is not so easy to tell a man what must be told again to a woman who wonders whether it will pay her to have a one-eyed man to eat breakfast with all along life's years

Brim is in the white sheets thinking, the doc is in his office thinking, the woman . . . the woman

[1928]

FRANÇOIS VILLON FORGOTTEN

THE women of the city where I was forgotten,
The dark-eyed women who forgot me heard me singing
And it helped them the more to be forgetting
And I sang and sang on helping them to forget
In the city where I sang to be forgotten

I slept with a woman ten men had forgotten
She said I'd forget her and she'd forget me
She said the two of us could sing one song
 On how bitter yesterday was
And another on tomorrow more bitter yet.
The two of us sang these songs

Five women said they would forget me,
Since I sang with a heart half-broken,
Since I sang like a man expecting nothing
 Five women have forgotten me
 Ask them and they answer
 He's dim as mist to remember
 and oh he's long gone

[1920]

BROKEN SONNET

MAY the weather next week be good to us
 The strong fighting birds, so often ugly,
Jab the songsters and bleed them
And send them away, the wranglers rule,
The fast breeders, the winter sparrows,
The crows The weeds, the quack grass,
The tough wire-grass, they have it all
Their way May the weather next week
Be good to us

[1920]

THE HAMMER

I HAVE seen
The old gods go
And the new gods come

Day by day
And year by year
The idols fall
And the idols rise

Today
I worship the hammer.

[1910]

HAMMERS POUNDING

GRANT had a sledgehammer pounding and pounding and Lee had a sledge-
hammer pounding and pounding
And the two hammers gnashed their ends against each other and broke
holes and splintered and withered
And nobody knew how the war would end and everybody prayed God his
hammer would last longer than the other hammer
Because the whole war hung on the big guess of who had the hardest
hammer
And in the end one side won the war because it had a harder hammer than
the other side
Give us a hard enough hammer, a long enough hammer, and we will
break any nation,
Crush any star you name or smash the sun and the moon into small
flinders

[1915]

SEE THE TREES

SEE the trees lean to the wind's way of learning
See the dirt of the hills shape to the water's way of learning
See the lift of it all go the way the biggest wind and the strongest water
want it

[1928]

THE WIND ON THE WAY

EVERY day is the last day
I have waited for tomorrow
And it has never come

A wash of sand on the beaches
And we handle it soft and write
Our names on it
The sand goes out, comes in,
And there is no tomorrow, no yesterday
Everything is now

I have heard sopranos in great cathedrals
Sing these high and low spokes of light

And I have heard lonesome accordion players
Ring the changes on it hi-hi and lo-lo

Every day is the last day
 Tomorrow is the wind on the way
[1920]

ALOOF

FIRE of winter sunset,
Your talk is red and gold
 In smoldering shadow.

Monolog of day and night
 between sun and stars,
You are an old man
 who chooses few words.
[1913]

DUST

HERE is dust remembers it was a rose
 one time and lay in a woman's hair
Here is dust remembers it was a woman
 one time and in her hair lay a rose
Oh things one time dust, what else now is it
 you dream and remember of old days?
[1913]

2. Little People

SWEEPING WENDY STUDY IN FUGUE

WENDY put her black eyes on me
and swept me with her black eyes—
sweep on sweep she swept me
Have you ever seen Wendy?
Have you ever seen her sweep
Keeping her black eyes on you
keeping you eyeswept?

PAPER I

PAPER is two kinds, to write on, to wrap with
If you like to write, you write
If you like to wrap, you wrap
Some papers like writers, some like wrappers
Are you a writer or a wrapper?

PAPER II

I WRITE what I know on one side of the paper
and what I don't know on the other
Fire likes dry paper and wet paper laughs at
fire
Empty paper sacks say, "Put something in me,
what are we waiting for?"
Paper sacks packed to the limit say, "We hope
we don't bust"
Paper people like to meet other paper people

DOORS

AN open door says, "Come in"
 A shut door says, "Who are you?"
 Shadows and ghosts go through shut doors
 If a door is shut and you want it shut,
 why open it?
 If a door is open and you want it open,
 why shut it?
 Doors forget but only doors know what it is
 doors forget

BOXES AND BAGS

THE bigger the box the more it holds
 Empty boxes hold the same as empty heads
 Enough small empty boxes thrown into a big empty box fill it full
 A half-empty box says, "Put more in"
 A big enough box could hold the world
 Elephants need big boxes to hold a dozen elephant handkerchiefs
 Fleas fold little handkerchiefs and fix them nice and neat in flea handker-
 chief-boxes
 Bags lean against each other and boxes stand independent
 Boxes are square with corners unless round with circles
 Box can be piled on box till the whole works comes tumbling
 Pile box on box and the bottom box says, "If you will kindly take notice
 you will see it all rests on me"
 Pile box on box and the top one says, "Who falls farthest if or when we
 fall? I ask you"
 Box people go looking for boxes and bag people go looking for bags

WE MUST BE POLITE

(Lessons for children on how to behave under peculiar circumstances)

1

If we meet a gorilla
 what shall we do?

Two things we may do
if we so wish to do

Speak to the gorilla,
very, very respectfully,
“How do you do, sir?”

Or, speak to him with less
distinction of manner,
“Hey, why don’t you go back
where you came from?”

2

If an elephant knocks on your door
and asks for something to eat,
there are two things to say

Tell him there are nothing but cold
victuals in the house and he will do
better next door

Or say We have nothing but six bushels
of potatoes—will that be enough for
your breakfast, sir?

ARITHMETIC

ARITHMETIC is where numbers fly like pigeons in and out of your head
Arithmetic tells you how many you lose or win if you know how many you
had before you lost or won

Arithmetic is seven eleven all good children go to heaven—or five six
bundle of sticks

Arithmetic is numbers you squeeze from your head to your hand to your
pencil to your paper till you get the answer

Arithmetic is where the answer is right and everything is nice and you can
look out of the window and see the blue sky—or the answer is wrong
and you have to start all over and try again and see how it comes out
this time

If you take a number and double it and double it again and then double
it a few more times, the number gets bigger and bigger and goes

higher and higher and only arithmetic can tell you what the number
is when you decide to quit doubling

Arithmetic is where you have to multiply—and you carry the multiplication
table in your head and hope you won't lose it

If you have two animal crackers, one good and one bad, and you eat one
and a striped zebra with streaks all over him eats the other, how many
animal crackers will you have if somebody offers you five six seven
and you say No no no and you say Nay nay nay and you say Nix
nix nix?

If you ask your mother for one fried egg for breakfast and she gives you
two fried eggs and you eat both of them, who is better in arithmetic,
you or your mother?

LITTLE GIRL, BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY

LITTLE girl, be careful what you say
when you make talk with words, words—
for words are made of syllables
and syllables, child, are made of air—
and air is so thin—air is the breath of God—
air is finer than fire or mist,
finer than water or moonlight,
finer than spider-webs in the moon,
finer than water-flowers in the morning:

and words are strong, too,
stronger than rocks or steel
stronger than potatoes, corn, fish, cattle,
and soft, too, soft as little pigeon-eggs,
soft as the music of hummingbird wings

So, little girl, when you speak greetings,
when you tell jokes, make wishes or prayers,
be careful, be careless, be careful,
be what you wish to be

3. Sky Talk

SKY TALK

Wool white horses and their heads sag and roll,
Snow white sheep and their tails drag far,
Impossible animals ever more impossible—
 They walk on the sky to say How do you do?
 Or Good-by or Back-soon-maybe

Or would you say any white flowers come
 more lovely than certain white clouds?
Or would you say any tall mountains beckon,
rise and beckon beyond certain tall walking clouds?

Is there any roll of white sea-horses equal to
 the sky-horse white of certain clouds rolling?

Now we may summon buyers and sellers
and tell them go buy certain clouds today,
 go sell other clouds tomorrow,
 and we may hear them report
Ups and downs, brisk buying, brisk selling,
Market unsteady, never so many fluctuations

Can there be any veering white fluctuations,
 any moving incalculable fluctuations
 quite so incalculable as certain clouds?

[Voices]

RIDDLES AND WHIMS (for Lloyd and Kathryn Lewis)

WHAT flies forever and rests never? The Wind So say Senegalese Maybe
they know Forever is a long time—it is beyond time And it rests never?
Could be I'll work on it

Who are the comrades that always fight, and never hurt each other? The
Teeth Here are the Senegalese again I let 'em have it

What runs faster than a horse, crosses water, and is not wet? The Sun
This is the French or, you might say, Early Frog

What man stands between two ravenous fishes? The tongue between the
teeth Samoans tell that one—a puppet play for chillern

Twenty brothers, each with a hat on his head, who are they? Fingers and
toes, with nails for hats Samoans again I like Samoans

The Irish farmer's wife in Derry, after he died she killed his horse To the
wailing landlord she cried, "Would ye have my man go about on foot in
the next world?" I like her She believed That next world was real to her

Wabash Avenue, a cold winter night, and an old Irishwoman selling pink-
sheet newspapers reporting on ponies in Florida that afternoon As she
handed me a paper for my two cents she wished me to know, "My hat
was on every horse!" This idea warmed her Down the home stretch came
the pounding hoofs And on every horse she had a hat I like her too

BRIGHT CONVERSATION WITH SAINT-EX

1

THERE is a desperate loveliness to be seen
in certain flowers and bright weeds on certain planets
With the weeds I have held long conversations
and I found them intelligent
even though desperate and lovely
The flowers however met me shortspoken
"Yes" and "No" and "Why?" were their favorite words
And they had other slow monosyllables
They seemed even to have practiced their monosyllables
They seemed to find it more difficult
Than the gaudy garrulous bright weeds
to be intelligent, desperate and lovely
Take a far journey now, my friend, to certain planets

Meet then certain flowers and bright weeds and ask them
What are the dark winding roots of their desperate loveliness
See whether you bring back the same report as mine
See whether certain long conversations
and certain slow practiced monosyllables
haunt you and keep coming back to haunt you
For myself, my friend, I have come to believe on certain planets
anything can happen

2

There was a ring of gold
kept its circle around the moon
five hours one Tuesday night
When the ring went away
it was gone in an eyeblink
and the moon stood alone
And I folded away in a little album
a pattern of moving gold haze
ready to fade in an eyeblink

3

When the smoke of the clouds parted
there came on the night blue of sky
the brighter blue of a little star
tremulous with hazards of travel
And why should I have been saying,
"Go forth, little star
Be not afraid, small traveller
Remember it holds importance
for you to be what you are
and be seen where you are
by random gazers like me"?
And I am asking why I should tell a star
to go on being a star.

MEADOW IN SUMMER

THE north summer wind swept the hay
The hay bowed howdy to the sun
The long hay meadow ran a flag of brown
To the skyline blue, a light sweet blue
Buy me a shirt of blue like that
Bury my daughters in blue like that

[Voices]

GUARANTEED ANTIQUE

LIFE is just a bowl of cherries
Death is a kiss and an ashtray

Suppose Judas Iscanot
had written Mary Magdalene
"I love you, I love you"
Would Mary have answered
"You you? Since when?"

Life is just a bowl of cherries
Death is a kiss and an ashtray

[Voices]

YOU SHALL HAVE HOMES

THESE are the fields I called for
These are the miles of the long night beginning.
These are the open ways of summer corn
These are the grass and the moon changing
Let the riddles of the yellow harvest come

You shall have homes
out and away in the blue mist,
off and gone in the gray haze,
you shall have homes

Go, birds, eat the last of the corn
Pick it up now in the harvest clean-ups
Then go, birds

The time of the gardens is come,
The time of the bold last blazes,
The time of the old slow burnings
Name over their names, bees, goldenrods,
Blues so much deeper than the earlier blues,
Yellows running out changes of yellow,
Purple putting out new strips of purple
The crisp of a weaving, dropping time is here

You shall have homes
Out and away, off and gone,
In a blue mist, in a gray haze—
You shall all have homes.

[1920]

TWO MOON FANTASIES

1

SHE bade the moon stand still
And the moon stood still for her,
At her request came to a stillstand
"I am in love," she was saying
She reached up with a single finger,
Pushed the moon with one little finger
And put the moon where she wanted it.
"I am in love," she was saying
On a later day, far later,
She found her magic lacking
The moon was the same
And her one finger the same
Yet nothing happened
And her laughter rang glad as she cried
"It was a good trick while it lasted"

2

The moon is a bucket of suds
yellow and smooth suds
The horses of the moon dip their heads
into this bucket and drink
The cats of the moon, the dogs, the rats,
they too go to this bucket for drink
Thus an apparition told it
To him the moon meant drink and drinkers

The moon is a disc of hidden books
Reach an arm into it
and feel around with your hands
and you bring out books already written
and many books yet to be written
for the moon holds past, present, future
Thus an apparition related the matter
To him the disc meant print and printers

DROWSY

SLEEP is the gift of many spiders
The webs tie down the sleepers easy

OUR HELLS

MILTON unlocked hell for us
and let us have a look
Dante did the same
Each of these hells is special
One is Milton's, one Dante's
Milton put in all that for him
was hell on earth
Dante put in all that for him
was hell on earth

If you unlock your hell for me
And I unlock my hell for you

They will be two special hells,
Each of us showing what for us
 is hell on earth
Yours is one hell, mine another

THIS STREET NEVER SLEEPS

At the corner
of Forty-second and Broadway
it is feet and wheels
wheels and feet
far in the morning

"Let us give Tomorrow nothing,"
is the cry down under

"What has Tomorrow done for us?"
is the asking,
feet and wheels
wheels and feet
far in the morning

There is a Fool sleeps
at Forty-second and Broadway
He knows so little
He knows almost nothing
He knows only the Wilderness waits
He knows the Wilderness comes
feet and wheels
wheels and feet
far in the morning
at Forty-second and Broadway

NEW SONG FOR INDIANA OPHELIA

Twist your fingers, cheery
Hum-ho on a jug in your head
Hum-ho fee-fi-fo and a rum-tum-tiddle-dee-oo Twist your apron, cheery.

Whistle what the fiddler hissed when he rosined the bow It's hell on the
Wabash in blossom time
So wash the dishes, so pick up the room, put a thornapple branch in a
pitcher of water, listen twice to the bobwhite call
So go on singing hum-ho tiddle-de-oo, twist your fingers in your apron,
cheery
Sing, "Blossoms O blossoms lay my head in tub of blossoms, bring me an
arm of blossoms, take 'em away, they kill me— No nah nah nah,
bring me back blossoms, lay my head in a tub of blossoms"

[1922]

MOONLIGHT AND MAGGOTS

THE moonlight filters on the prairie
The land takes back an old companion
The young corn seems pleased with a visit
In Illinois, in Iowa, this moontime is on
A bongo looks out and talks about the look of the moon
As if always a bongo must talk somewhat so in moontime—
The moon is a milk-white love promise,
A present for the young corn to remember,
A caress for silk-brown tassels to come
Spring moon to autumn moon measures one harvest.
All almanacs are merely so many moon numbers
A house dizzy with decimal points and trick figures
And a belfry at the top of the world for sleep songs
And a home for lonesome goats to go to—
Like now, like always, the bongo takes up a moon theme—
There is no end to the ancient kit-kats inhabiting the moon—
Jack and the beanstalk and Jacob's ladder helped them up,
Cats and sheep, the albatross, the phoenix and the dodo-bird,
They are all living on the moon for the sake of the bongo—
Castles on the moon, mansions, shacks and shanties, ramshackle
Huts of tarpaper and tincans, grand real estate properties
Where magnificent rats eat tunnels in colossal cheeses,
Where the rainbow chasers take the seven prisms apart
And put them together again and are paid in moon money—
The flying dutchman, paul bunyan, saint paul, john bunyan,

The little jackass who coughs gold pieces when you say brucklebrit—
They are all there on the moon and the rent not paid
And the roof leaking and the taxes delinquent—
Like now, like always, the bongo jabbers of the moon,
Of cowsheds, railroad tracks, corn rows and cornfield corners
Finding the filter of the moon an old friend—
Look at it—cries the bongo—have a look! have a look!

Well, what of it? comes the poohpooh—
Always the bongo is a little loony—comes the poohpooh,
The bongo is a poor fish and a long ways from home
Be like me, be an egg, a hardboiled egg, a pachyderm
Practical as a buzzsaw and a hippopotamus put together
Get the facts and no monkeybusiness what I mean
The moon is a dead cinder, a ball of death, a globe of doom
Long ago it died of lost motion, maggots masticated the surface of it
And the maggots languished, turned ice, froze on and took a free ride
Now the sun shines on the maggots and the maggots make the moonlight
The moon is a cadaver and a dusty mummy and a damned rotten investment
The moon is a liability loaded up with frozen assets and worthless paper
Only the lamb, the sucker, the come-on, the little lost boy, has time for
the moon

Well—says the bongo—you got a good argument
I am a little lost boy and a long ways from home
I am a sap, a pathetic fish, a nitwit and a lot more and worse you couldn't
think of
Nevertheless and notwithstanding and letting all you say be granted and
acknowledged
The moon is a silver silhouette and a singing stalactite
The moon is a bringer of fool's gold and fine phantoms
On the heaving restless sea or the fixed and fastened land
The moon is a friend for the lonesome to talk with
The moon is at once easy and costly, cheap and priceless
The price of the moon runs beyond all adding machine numbers
Summer moonmusic drops down *adagio sostenuto* whathaveyou
Winter moonmusic practices the mind of man for a long trip
The price of the moon is an orange and a few kind words.

Nobody on the moon says, I been thrown out of better places than this
 No one on the moon has ever died of arithmetic and hard words
 No one on the moon would skin a louse to sell the hide
 The moon is a pocket luckpiece for circus riders, for acrobats on the flying
 rings, for wild animal tamers
 I can look up at the moon and take it or leave it
 The moon coaxes me Be at home wherever you are
 I can let the moon laugh me to sleep for nothing
 I can put a piece of the moon in my pocket for tomorrow
 I can holler my name at the moon and the moon hollers back my name
 When I get confidential with the moon and tell secrets
 The moon is a sphinx and a repository under oath

Yes Mister poohpooh
 I am a poor nut, just another of God's mistakes
 You are a tough bimbo, hard as nails, yeah
 You know enough to come in when it rains
 You know the way to the post office and I have to ask
 They might fool you the first time but never the second
 Thrown into the river you always come up with a fish
 You are a diller a dollar, I am a ten o'clock scholar
 You know the portent of the axiom Them as has gits
 You devised that abracadabra Get all you can keep all you get

We shall always be interfering with each other, forever be arguing—
 you for the maggots, me for the moon
 Over our bones, cleaned by the final maggots as we lie recumbent, perfectly forgetful, beautifully ignorant—
 There will settle over our grave illustrious tombs
 On nights when the air is clear as a bell
 And the dust and fog are shovelled off on the wind—
 There will sink over our empty epitaphs
 a shiver of moonshafts
 a line of moonslants

SPECIAL STARLIGHT

THE Creator of night and of birth
 was the Maker of the stars.

Shall we look up now at stars in Winter
And call them always sweeter friends
Because this story of a Mother and a Child
Never is told with the stars left out?

Is it a Holy Night now when a child issues
Out of the dark and the unknown
Into the starlight?

Down a Winter evening sky
when a woman hovers
between two great doorways,
between entry and exit,
between pain to be laughed at,
joy to be wept over—
do the silver-white lines
then come from holy stars?
shall the Newcomer, the Newborn,
be given soft flannels,
swaddling-cloths called Holy?

Shall all wanderers over the earth, all homeless ones,
All against whom doors are shut and words spoken—
Shall these find the earth less strange tonight?
Shall they hear news, a whisper on the night wind?
“A Child is born ” “The meek shall inherit the earth ”

“And they crucified Him they spat upon Him.
And He rose from the dead ”

Shall a quiet dome of stars high over
Make signs and a friendly language
Among all nations?

Shall they yet gather with no clenched fists at all,
And look into each other's faces and see eye to eye,
And find ever new testaments of man as a sojourner
And a toiler and a brother of fresh understandings?

Shall there be now always
believers and more believers

of sunset and moonrise,
of moonset and dawn,
of wheeling numbers of stars,
and wheels within wheels?

Shall plain habitations off the well-known roads
Count now for a little more than they used to?

Shall plain ways and people held close to earth
Be reckoned among things to be written about?
Shall tumult, grandeur, fanfare, panoply, prepared loud noises
Stand equal to a quiet heart, thoughts, vast dreams
Of men conquering the earth by conquering themselves?
Is there a time for ancient genius of man
To be set for comparison with the latest generations?
Is there a time for stripping to simple, childish questions?

On a Holy Night we may say
The Creator of night and of birth
was the Maker of the stars

THE PRESS IS PECULIAR

THE morning newspaper is useful,
Likewise the evening pink sheet
For the service of these anonymous
Hopefuls who go forth and seek
The reward from whosoever
May be so good as to hand them,
Any anonymous one of them,
The boon and bestowal of a job
First of all the newspaper
Passed the time for them,
Told them of dead and living fools,
Of follies and enterprises,
Of men dead as doornails,
Of women soft as pity and mist,
Of bank wrecks, wage cuts,

Tomatoes, potatoes, cheaper,
Better times ahead
Just around the corner
Happy days here again,
Headlines, want ads, comic strips,
Kaleidoscopic phantasmagoria—
It passed the time for them
And when night came with mercy,
Night and the sleep time of proud man,
Either on a crummy flophouse floor
Or else on the chilly park grass,
They had a bed and a blanket to order,
The morning paper, the evening pink sheet
It is neither a boast nor a conjecture
The press is peculiar
The press serves the public

[1933]

GLASS HOUSE CANTICLE

Bless Thee, O Lord, for the living arc of the sky over me this morning

Bless Thee, O Lord, for the companionship of night mist far above the
skyscraper peaks I saw when I woke once during the night

Bless Thee, O Lord, for the miracle of light to my eyes and the mystery
of it ever changing

Bless Thee, O Lord, for the laws Thou hast ordained holding fast these
tall oblongs of stone and steel, holding fast the planet Earth in its
course and farther beyond the cycle of the Sun

SWELL PEOPLE

THERE will always be monkeys and peacocks,
The monkeys for melancholy, the peacocks for pride,
The monkeys for chatter and crying out loud,

The peacocks for showing their tails and a fan of feathers
Either they will be at your door soon
Or you will meet them the next time you travel
Who can get away from them?
And they always say they are well met

PUBLIC LETTER TO EMILY DICKINSON

FIVE little roses spoke
for God to be near them,
for God to be witness

Flame and thorn were there
in and around five roses,
winding flame, speaking thorn.

Pour from the sea
one hand of salt
Take from a star
one finger of mist
Pick from a heart
one cry of silver

Let be, give over
to the moving blue
of the chosen shadow.

Let be, give over
to the ease of gongs,
to the might of gongs

Share with the flamewon,
choose from your thorns,
for God to be near you,
for God to be witness

SCRIPTURE

WILLIE HENDERSON, Massachusetts-born, painted and dreamed in Chicago, ending in The City of the Holy Faith of Francis of Assisi, on the maps written as Santa Fé,
Where Willie paints, dreams, whistles, and sings offkey, where Willie on a day meets Alfonzo and the father of Alfonzo
"It is a hard year, let me pay you for the alfalfa you let me feed my pony," said Willie to the father of Alfonzo at the pueblo of San Ildefonso
"We have it together now," said the father of Alfonzo, "and when it is gone we go without it together," said the father of Alfonzo

[1925]

WALL SHADOWS

THESE walls they knew those shadows
Who moved then as shadows holding bones,
Lights and tongues spread over bones
Now with those shadows gone from these walls
Do these walls ever say, "When we try, we can remember those shadows"?

ONE MODERN POET

HAVING heard the instruction
"Be thou no swine,"
He belabored himself and wrote
"Beware of the semblance
of lard at thy flanks"

LIGHT AND MOONBELLS

THEY could bend low
and be to each other
a blue beam of molten light
They wrought together keepsakes
thin as the air of five moonbells

CORNUCOPIA

THE naked cornucopia of autumn fields
bids us look for the harvest moon
and many buttons of green become gold,
tawny spun mist of haze hung hither
and many leaves blown thither, shaken,
change on change of russet and umber,
floats foretelling snow maybe soon,
in huts of thought, in witness rooms,
snowfalls, long white snowfalls often

LITTLE CANDLE

LIGHT may be had for nothing
or the low cost of looking, seeing,
and the secrets of light come high
Light knows more than it tells
Does it happen the sun, the moon
choose to be dazzling, baffling?
They do demand deep loyal communions
So do the angles of moving stars
So do the seven sprays of the rainbow
So does any little candle
speaking for itself in its personal corner

MOMENTS OF DAWN RIDERS

THOSE who straddle foaming sea-horses and ride into the sunrise
do so with no instrument board, no timetables
Those who watch one rainbow after another dissolve in seven prisms
they seem to gather reputations for being rainbow chasers—
they also choose bright mornings of clear weather and fading daystars
to study the organization of the sprockets of the bursting dawn
They go out of their way to contemplate either a forty-eight-hour blizzard
or a short light snowfall and the bigger the flakes the shorter—

and the slow shadows of a summer moondown they wouldn't try to make
 over
 nor any significant bushels of potatoes nor baskets of corn running over
 nor poignant orchids ready to perish at a wrong breath or accent
 nor any single scarlet moss-rose piteous in a wild raumdrench
 nor a boy of brown hair and eyes at Saipan, "It's hard to go,"
 nor a blue-eyed boy at Arnhem with a wry smile, "Good-by chum this
 is it."

CROSSED NUMBERS

DELPHINIUMS are born
 and why is a why
 and when is a when

Folded and kept for unfolding
 one in a series of leaves
 moves in a cunning of numbers
 and numbers are never and now
 and why is a why

One is a two is a number
 Join them and cross them
 and see them be numbers
 be numbers beyond numbers

Toss them in wanton spirals
 Weave them in grave communions
 Frame them with lighted eyelashes
 Let them have opening closing lips
 The wind is a when and a how
 and a giver of laughing numbers
 and a thrower of crying numbers

One delphinium by itself
 is a who and a who
 A stalk of blue from a weaving earth
 A sheaf skyblue from a waltzing sun
 And one is a two is a number
 And a spoke of light is a why
 And one yes one is a who and a who

[UMPAWAUG FARM, *Connecticut*, 1933]

NIGHT BELLS

Two bells six bells two bells six bells
On a blue pavilion
Out across a smooth blue pavilion
And between each bell
One clear cry of a woman
“Lord God you made the night too long too long”

HARMONICA HUMDRUMS

And so the days pass
and so we drift and dawdle
Bright stood the mountains,
brighter loomed the sea
And so the nights go on
and so we flash and fade.
Green lay the hills,
greener a river evening
Stones wore gray lichen
and trees a morn mist
And so the gold be gone
And so the harm be ashes
First moved the moonrise
Later dropped the moondown
Handy shoved the dawn
Handydandy shone the sun.

[Poetry]

CHANGING LIGHT WINDS

CHANGING light winds
blew over the sea,
came blue, came gold,
came silver with spray,
came white in dreamsnow
with long foam feathers,

long sleepy snowfalls,
then gray over the flats
an overcast of monotone—
night and stars a while
then night and no stars

NUMBER MAN

(for the ghost of Johann Sebastian Bach)

He was born to wonder about numbers.

He balanced fives against tens
and made them sleep together
and love each other

He took sixes and sevens
and set them wrangling and fighting
over raw bones

He woke up twos and fours
out of baby sleep
and touched them back to sleep

He managed eights and nines,
gave them prophet beards,
marched them into mists and mountains

He added all the numbers he knew,
multiplied them by new-found numbers
and called it a prayer of Numbers

For each of a million cipher silences
he dug up a mate number
for a candle light in the dark

He knew love numbers, luck numbers,
how the sea and the stars
are made and held by numbers

He died from the wonder of numbering
He said good-by as if good-by is a number

[Poetry]

ANYWHERE AND EVERYWHERE PEOPLE

THERE are people so near nothing
 they are everywhere without being seen
There are people so eager to be seen
 they nearly always manage to be seen
There are people who want to be everywhere at once
 and they seem to get nowhere
There are people who have never been anywhere
 and they are less anxious about it than those
 who have been everywhere
Could it be there are people so near to nothing
 they might be so humble as to say, "We go
 everywhere without being seen and it comes
 right easy on us?"
Could it be there are people who have never been seen
 anywhere and they ask people who have been seen
 everywhere, "How does it feel to be seen everywhere?"

